18. “God called us here for a reason”
Karen and Chin Baptist Churches in Victoria: Mission from the Margins of a Diaspora Community

Darren Cronshaw, Stacey Wilson and Meewon Yang, with Ner Dah, Si Khia, Arohn Kuung, and Japheth Lian

Approximately 8,500 Karen and Chin Baptists have migrated to Australia over recent years. These people groups of Burma (Myanmar) are majority Christian but many are displaced because of intense persecution and injustice. Karen and Chin migrants have settled mainly in Melbourne, Perth, Brisbane and Sydney and formed approximately fifty new congregations. This is a significant source of growth for Australian Baptists, and presents new opportunities and challenges for ministry in a multicultural society. This action research project collaboratively researches the life and ministry of Karen and Chin Baptist Churches in Australia with interviews of key church leaders. It affirms the strengths of Karen and Chin congregations, and identifies their challenges and opportunities for mission. The project particularly explores implications for broader mission beyond Karen and Chin migrants and implications for ministry of second-generation Chin and Karen young people. It is a case study of mission to, through and by and beyond the margins of a Diaspora community.

Introduction

Westgate was one of the first Baptist churches to welcome refugees from Burma (Myanmar). The first Karen family to arrive was Reginald and Pau Lu Lu and four children. In January 2000 Melbourne hosted the Baptist World Alliance (BWA) Congress. Rev Arohn and Esther Kuung, a Chin couple, escaped persecution by travelling through the Indian-Burma border, adopted identities and joined the India delegation to BWA. They sought and were granted asylum as refugees fleeing persecution. Rev Kuung is now pastor of Chin Baptist Church meeting in Sunshine. Both the Karen and the Chin people had experienced the persecution of the Burmese military and given the nature of the tension and the uncertainty of life, one could
understand that different groups might have had uncertainty about the extent to which they could trust other groups. But on 14 February 2000, Reginald and Pau Lu Lu welcomed Arohm and Esther into their very small home. In fact, a double bed and wardrobe filled the space in the small shed that was to become their home for five months. For those looking on, what was so powerful was the sense that those who had received hospitality were quick to show hospitality to the newest group of refugees, despite they themselves living in a small crowded space with very little resources. When Arohm and Esther moved on to their own home, they also continued to house and help other refugees as they arrived.¹

Over recent years, approximately 8,500 Baptists born in Burma have migrated to Australia, a significant portion of the 21,761 people born in Burma who are now living in Australia.² The diaspora from Burma are majority Christian but many are displaced because of intense persecution and injustice. Diaspora migrants from Burma have settled mainly in Melbourne, Perth, Brisbane and Sydney and formed fifty-three new Baptist congregations, including twenty-four in Victoria (and thirteen in Queensland, nine in Western Australia and six in New South Wales). Victoria has 5,608 people born in Burma, of whom 2,280 (40.7%) are Baptist and 4,117 (72.5%) have arrived in the decade 2001–2011.³ This is a significant source of growth for Australian and specifically Victorian Baptists, and more continue to arrive every year, which presents new opportunities and challenges for ministry in a multicultural society.

This project researches the life and ministry of Diaspora Karen and Chin Baptist Churches in Victoria, Australia, and identifies challenges and opportunities for mission. We particularly want to explore implications for broader mission beyond Karen and Chin migrants and ministry for second-generation young people. Methodologically, this is an action research project – a cooperative project of Baptist Union staff and Karen and Chin Baptist church leaders researching together how to best foster mission.⁴ This chapter is an initial overview, to be followed up with further

---

¹ Newton Daddow, Swinburne University Chaplain, Interview with Darren Cronshaw, 10 September 2014.
³ Victoria, 2011 Census, Burma; Table 4 and 9.
exploration of mission to, through, with, by and beyond Karen and Chin people as a Diaspora community.

**Karen and Chin Victorian Baptist churches**

Victorian Baptist Churches have embraced multiculturalism for many years. There are 70 Baptist congregations in Victoria that worship in Languages Other Than English (LOTE), representing around a third of all Baptist Churches. The two largest language groups are Chin and Karen from a Burmese background. Chin and Karen congregations usually meet within their own language groups but it is becoming more common for them to join in partnerships or have combined membership with English-speaking churches; especially for the Karen congregations. Many also attend the English-speaking services as well; especially the young people who are becoming more fluent in English.

Karen and Chin refugees come from a context of intense religious and political persecution and suffering and human rights violations, and often have had to wait in Thailand or Malaysia for 5-10 years seeking asylum.⁵ Refugees from Burma to Australia are mostly affiliated with Baptist as a denomination, due to the strong missionary work of Baptists in Burma. When they arrive, they often quickly establish a connection with a Baptist congregation, but they – especially Chin groups – also embrace people from different denominational backgrounds. The main congregational marker and attraction is the tribal language group rather than a particular denomination. The Burmese community is spread throughout Melbourne (west and outer-east), Geelong and Bendigo in fourteen Chin Baptist congregations, nine Karen Baptist congregations, and three Kareni congregations that network with BUV.

Some Karen and Chin describe their settlement in Australia as temporary, until they are able to return to Burma. They see themselves as a pilgrim people, in exile in Australia in a country of safety and freedom, in stark contrast to the persecution and political instability in Burma.⁶ But most want to make a permanent new home in Australia. Church leaders are aware of the need for helping their people engage productively with their adopted community, just as Jeremiah encouraged the Hebrew exiles to build houses, plant gardens, grow families and, 'seek the welfare of the city

---

⁵ Ner Dah, "Reading the Kingdom Teaching of Matthew from the Context of Myanmar" (DTheol thesis, MCD, 2009), 12, 25-41; Ronald Lal Din Suah, Pastor Melbourne Miao Church, Interview with Darren Comshaw and Stacey Wilson, Camberwell, 15 August 2014.

⁶ Rev Za Taub Ngur, Australia Zotung Church Pastor, Interview with Meewon Yang, Footscray, 29 August 2014.
where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare’ (Jeremiah 29:5-7). Rev Ronald Lal Din Suah, pastor of Melbourne Mizo Church in Ringwood, commented: ‘We came with a little box and try to grow a little flower without roots in this country, but with that attitude it does not lead us far.’ He encourages his congregation to make the most of opportunities to get to know their community and neighbours, to learn English and seize opportunities, and to be open to the mission they as a church are called to. Rev Suah often says: ‘God has called us here for a reason.’

Diaspora missiologists express the conviction that people are moving across the world as part of God’s purposes. To advance the Kingdom of God, therefore, will mean being aware of these diaspora movements and identifying and empowering their mission potential. What, then, is the missional purpose for the Karen and Chin diaspora in Victoria and Australia, what are the associated challenges and opportunities, and what do they need to fulfill the next stage of their missional potential?

**Mission from the margins of a Diaspora community**

In examining the challenges of the Diaspora from Burma it would be easy to stay focused on the troubled political situation in Myanmar, or unpack the amazing stories of resilience among Karen and Chin, or develop strategies for assisting new arrivals, but the focus of this chapter is empowering Karen and Chin for cooperating with the mission of God. Diaspora missiology differentiate mission to a diaspora group, mission through a diaspora group, and mission by and beyond them.

**Mission to Karen and Chin**

Karen and Chin are majority Christian groups, so mission to them is not necessarily primarily evangelism but hospitality, advocacy and community development.

One way of supporting Karen and Chin is through BUV’s Refugee Airfare/Assistance Loans Scheme (RAALS). This Humanitarian program offers a no interest loan for a family to pay for the air ticket of a relative who has obtained a visa to re-settle in Australia. It has enabled over 500 refugees to Australia over 10 years. It has extended to car loans as transport is a crucial need for refugee families.

---

7 Suah, Interview.
9 *Wan, Diaspora Missiology.*
Another expression of care and mission to Karen and Chin people is sponsoring them for a Global Special Humanitarian Programme Visa (sub-class 202). Croydon Hills Baptist Church people have sponsored ten Karen families. Margaret Moran, as Karen Support Worker, is appreciated as a strong advocate of the Karen people. She and others from the church have written many letters of support for newcomers in their applications for no interest loans and airfare assistance, and for supporting families in Visa applications. Croydon Hills Karen and English-speaking congregations together run The Hope Project, which has directed more than $120,000 in material aid and supports visiting team projects to Karen in the Thai-Burma border refugee camps for people from their own and neighbouring Australian churches.10

Back in Australia, employment opportunities are a vital need for Karen and Chin migrants. The challenges of language and varying levels of English language literacy make seeking and obtaining work difficult. There is also a sense of responsibility to provide for not just for family in Australia, but also financially support family members in refugee camps or back in Burma. A variety of social enterprises are currently being explored in partnership with the BUV, Baptcare and local churches.

“Eleven41” cleaning is one of the first social enterprise businesses. Bendigo Baptist Community Care was concerned by the isolation of many Karen, particularly the women. In consultation with local leaders and Bendigo businesses, they helped start the business in 2011. It offers training and support as well as employment, and has grown with domestic and commercial contracts to 12 part-time Karen cleaning staff. Through the Victorian Training Group they teach a Certificate II in Cleaning Operations and Certificate III in Asset Maintenance, which has trained 100 Karen. Tha Wah states:

It is not just that they get a little bit of work, the good thing is that they get a certificate so that later, in say five years when they understand more English they can apply for jobs. They will be more confident about themselves; they have experience, and a qualification. That is a very good thing.11

With the help of start-up capital from, Baptcare, ‘Eleven41’ social enterprises are now also in Werribee, Croydon Hills and Cloverdale. The name comes from Luke 11:41 where Jesus tells the Pharisees of the day that in order to be clean on the inside we must be generous to the poor.

10 http://thehopeproject.org.au/about/about-history
11 Tha Wah, Church secretary, Bendigo Baptist Karen Congregation, Interview with Stacey Wilson, 14 August 2014.
One of the biggest challenges of integrating into Australian culture and employment is learning English. Table 1 shows 40.5% of Burma-born people in Victoria who speak another language report speaking English well or very well, but 37.1% say they speak English not well and 11.2% not at all.

Table 1: Proficiency in Spoken English, Burma (Republic of the Union of Myanmar)-born, Victoria: 2011, 2006

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proficiency in spoken English (Self-assessment)</th>
<th>Persons</th>
<th>% of total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Speaks English only</td>
<td>541</td>
<td>9.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaks other language and speaks English:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very well</td>
<td>758</td>
<td>13.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Well</td>
<td>1,514</td>
<td>27.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not well</td>
<td>2,079</td>
<td>37.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>627</td>
<td>11.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not stated</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Victoria</strong></td>
<td><strong>5,605</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Rev Dr Si Khia of Lautu Chin Baptist Church reports that with limited English skills, church members cannot acquire qualifications to get jobs even though they have practical work skills such as electrical works or carpentry. Helping Burma-born people learn English is thus a major need. But newcomers also need assistance with government agencies, housing, employment, driving instruction and business development.

Westgate Baptist Community (Yarraville) congregation has supported the Burmese community, both Chin and Karen, for over 20 years. They host a Karen congregation and Baptcare provided a grant to assist Westgate in running two Chin Refugee Women's groups, operating since 2008. These groups focus on all forms of integration, including language, literacy, accessing services and using public transport. Stresses for Karen and Chin include culture shock, financial pressure, anxiety, loneliness, isolation and facing materialism. A supportive community of peers as well as expert help is important for supporting new arrivals.

12 Victoria, 2011 Census, Burma, Table 7.
13 Si Khia, Pastor Lautu Chin Baptist Church, Survey Questionnaire, 5 June 2014.
English-speaking churches relate to Karen and Chin churches in different ways – from renting space to partnering to being one church with two congregations. English-speaking congregations can help and support Chin and Karen churches with friendship and space for worship, and with practical help with English and access to community services. But there is also a lot that English congregations can learn from Karen and Chin. They often have a resilience and perseverance in their faith that is inspiring. No doubt there are aspects of understanding God and Scripture that will be a Karen and Chin gift to the Baptist Union of Victoria and broader Australian church. Margaret Moran says that the Karen congregation at Croydon Hills has enriched the broader congregation immeasurably, and has helped them develop a cultural diversity that is also attractive to many other cultures. Partnership with culturally diverse congregations can be mutually enriching.

There is a limitation in the prepositions of diaspora missiology as “to”, “through”, or “by and beyond”, since a fourth important preposition “with” is missing. Perhaps this is implied, but practicing mission “with” one another – Karen and Chin churches with English-speaking and other Australian churches – is a critical underlying value for mission in a post-colonial context.

Sharing and learning from one another has been Westgate's experience. Their early impacts of the life of refugees from Burma continue to reverberate today. Mid 2014, a group of 12 Westgaters took a trip to Kuala Lumpur to share education and health resources through teachers and nurses in Chin programs in refugee area of KL. Their reports on their return pointed to the transformation in their own lives as they reflected on the faithfulness, courage and resilience of the refugees still languishing in really difficult circumstances.

Mission through Karen and Chin

Some Australian churches have a mission to and alongside Karen and Chin people, but the biggest opportunity for Karen and Chin ministry is through Karen and Chin churches, and this begins with welcome and hospitality. Rev Dr Marc Chan, Multicultural Inclusion worker for BUV, reported that Western Australia Chin Christian Church joined the Baptist Union in October 2007 and grew from 20 to 500 adults in seven years:

16 Margaret Moran, Karen Support Worker, Interview with Meewon Yang, Croydon Hills, 3 August 2014.
17 Daddow, Interview.
They have a very simple but effective way of helping new migrants/refugees. Through their contact with government agencies, they receive notice of new families migrating to WA. The Church leadership assigns a family to take care of the newcomers. They will be met at the airport and taken to pre-arranged/emergency accommodation. The Church will give the new arrivals a love offering to help them during the first week of their arrival here. The family looking after them will organise for the Pastor to visit the new family and they will have a welcoming service at their home. They will be provided transport to attend Church on Sundays and also for other group meetings until they can provide their own. They are also helped to access government agencies to help them settle here. This has been instrumental in more than 95% of those newcomers staying in the Church.¹⁸

Most if not all Karen and Chin congregations likewise help newcomers with logistics and offer a caring community. With a strong communal ethic, Chin and Karen churches naturally are strong on caring for one another through crises and difficulties – whether the challenges of newly arriving or the stresses of unemployment, illness or grief of death.¹⁹

The hospitality and activities of church life meets social and other needs for many Karen and Chin new arrivals. As well as multiple worship services, Karen and Chin churches organise sport, conferences, music and socials. A two day Baptist Union of Victoria Multicultural Soccer Tournament has been staged three times, with eight to fifteen church teams including Chin and Karen. Chin Baptist churches in Victoria invite guest speakers to teach and encourage Chin churches, and also share the Gospel with the general Chin community. For example, Victorian Chin Baptist Church (VCBC) in Mooroolbark ran a week Summer camp in January 2013. They invited an American guest speaker who addressed culture and spirituality. The Chin Christian Council in Australia (CCCA) hosted a youth leaders' conference in January 2014, which similarly focused on culture and Christianity. Perth Karen Baptist Church has been sponsoring well-known music bands who perform secular music and as part of their concerts share their faith journey and invite those attending to come to Church on Sunday where they will also be performing – this time songs with Christian messages. Karen and Chin churches have ministered to the wider Burmese community by inviting them together to celebrating important cultural events and customs.

Karen and Chin peoples often want to maintain and celebrate their culture. Karen leaders Rev Moo Hei and Jordan Pe comment that the main focus of Croydon Hills congregation includes spiritual growth, welcoming others and language and culture maintenance: Growing together spiritually; deepening our relationship with God and at the same time, providing a safe place for the Karen community as they settle into their new life. We feel God has brought us here for a purpose; for a new future. We need not to forget the living God and always be grateful for Australia which has been like coming into the Promised Land. We are God's ambassadors here to welcome others and protect culture, language and worship.

They hold a sense of destiny about being a diaspora people in Australia: "God has brought us here for a purpose; for a new future." They take pride in welcoming new arrivals and helping protect their culture, and that is part of their mission and the reason they are here in Australia. However, mission cannot be limited to preserving their culture and is not just about mission to Karen and Chin.

Many of the pastors interviewed expressed a deep sense of God's divine purpose in the Burmese diaspora to Australia. Their coming to this place is part of God's plan for their lives and as such they are excited to live out God's kingdom here. Tha Wah, Karen Church Secretary at Bendigo, said:

> A lot of people say this is our God who sends us here ... after we came here we got a lot of people support, we never knew each other before and now we are very good to each other. People who believe and understand God think it is just amazing that God prepared them to leave that situation step by step.

**Tribalism, women's roles, second-generation and leaders**

One of the ongoing challenges of mission through Karen and Chin people is their linguistic and cultural diversity, but this is also an opportunity for profound witness and growth. Karen have one main uniform language, Sgaw Karen; and Pwo Karen, spoken by the Newport congregation. Chin peoples are far more complex. Of the fourteen groups in Melbourne, there are nine different language groups: Falam, Haka, Lautu, Matu, Mizo, Teddim, Zo, Zomi, Zotung. Different Karen and Chin, even

---

20 Moo Hei, Pastor Croydon Hills Baptist Karen congregation, and Jordan Pe, elder, Interview with Meewon Yang, Croydon Hills, 3 August 2014.
21 Wah, Interview.
when they share the same language, come from or through different countries, refugee camps and churches. Church members are inherently fragile in relationships with each other and their churches. Thus leaders are not interested in presenting challenging issues that may threaten or disrupt their hard work in building community. This helps explain the commitment of the churches to meet together, for worship but also for community support. Chin and Karen leaders also appreciate support from BUV in leadership training, and in hosting them together despite sub-cultural and language differences.23

Apart from tribal differences, there are also differences of expectation with gender roles. Karen and Chin women in Australia are exposed to more egalitarian relationships, work opportunities, theological education and church leadership. This encourages women to embrace a more active place in church life, but goes against cultural norms. Pastor Pancha Tintuep shares her hope to share a vision for women contributing alongside men in church and society, in Australia and Burma:

In the church I am sharing how important men and women are in the eyes of God, and how we are both valued by God. Don’t see [women] as human sees but see as God’s people, all made in God’s image. … I want to go back and encourage lots of women in what they can do. No one can stop what they can do if God permitted them, then they can do anything.24

The shift in the roles and opportunities available for women can be challenging for families and church communities, but is also an opportunity for empowering women alongside men for mission.

Another big challenge of mission through Karen and Chin is the second generation of migrants. Of 5,607 Burma-born people living in Victoria in 2011, 1,742 (31%) are aged 0-25 and another 1,271 (22.7%) are aged 26-34; a very young population. The Burma-born population has less 0-4 and 5-9 year olds proportionately than the Victorian population, about the same 10-14 year olds, and then spiking with significantly more of every five-year bracket from 15 to 39.25 Of all Burma-born people in Victoria, 63.3% are a couple family with children (compared to 47.1% in Australia’s population) and

23  Barnden, Email.
25  Victoria, 2011 Census, Burma, Table 6.
11.6% are one-parent families (compared to 10.6%).26 The needs for youth, young adult ministry and young families ministries among Karen and Chin churches is high.

Apart from the numbers of young people in Karen and Chin churches, there are challenging dynamics for second-generation migrants. Chin and Karen parents and elders are eager to maintain their culture and way of doing things. The Karen Pastors Network recalls a common statement from their community that echoes this concern: "If you have lost your language you have lost your identity."27 This is a challenge for Karen and Chin churches as they try to maintain their cultural identity, but without isolating themselves and alienating their children who want to learn English and adapt to local/Western culture with different gender roles, parenting styles, expressions of respect and career expectations.

There is a hope that the second generation can make the most of education and opportunities in Australia, but also use that to give wider expression to the strengths and gifts of Chin and Karen cultures. Rev Saw Ner Dah describes the importance of helping the second generation to maintain a connection to their cultural roots: "If you put all colours together that will be a messy colour but if you have red colour and your own colour, then you can mix with others you can be helpful and creative with your own identity."28

Rev Suah acknowledges that if they do well with their next generation, the church will continue; and if not, the church may decline. He wants to start a second service for his youth group in English, but older members and leaders see this as a threat and compromise to young people not learning Mizo language. Unfortunately the young people do not currently understand church in their dialect, and in future years are more likely not to understand.29

Yet Karen and Chin migrants hold out great hope for their children and what they may be able to achieve. Pancha Tintuep comments: "My thoughts and my ideas will not be the same as my daughters when they grow up. But I have lots of hope, how after ten years, how our children will turn out. These kids will lead the church and I am excited."30

26 Victoria, 2011 Census, Burma, Table 27.
27 Karen Pastors, Focus Group.
28 Saw Ner Dah, Survey questionnaire.
29 Suah, Interview.
30 Tintuep, Interview.
It is important to develop pathways for leadership development and opportunity through Karen and Chin churches, and this can be supported by Karen and Chin networks and by the Baptist Union. A strategic question is how can emerging leaders be identified and developed?

Pastoral leadership is one of the leadership challenges. Some congregations have struggled to find suitable leadership. For example, Karen Pastors in Burma can only be ordained if they are over 40, married to someone with theological training and have children. In most situations only ordained people can preside over communion, baptism and benediction. Churches commonly get into conflict over leadership issues. TransFormation is an initiative run at Whitley College – the Baptist Theological College. The course provides theological education at a level suitable for those with limited English. More than 500 students have attended the course over the last ten years, and the majority of these have been Burmese. The BUV has raised funds for scholarships, and the course has provided an important bridge into the Union’s life. It has also been a means of developing a pathway towards ordination for four Burmese pastors.

Thus tribalism, women’s roles, second generation continuity and leadership development are some of the challenges for Karen and Chin churches in Australia, but there are also huge needs in Myanmar. The primary way Karen and Chin churches understand and practice mission is by supporting churches, missionaries and students back in Burma. For example, Mizo Christian Fellowship in Croydon supports four missionaries and two college students who work in Burma in rural mission areas, often reaching out to neighbouring non-Christian groups.31 Rev Thomas Mung commented that mission is broad but Chin churches tend to focus on their home country:

Our only focus until now for us has been to support local people to do mission in our home country. This may be the case as a result of the lack of both vision and money. We are more concerned about our own people who are suffering under a bad political and governing system.32

There is a lot to focus on as Karen and Chin cooperate with God in mission through them to their own people in Australia. Their migration to Australia is still relatively new – in most cases less than ten years. An immediate concern is to take care of those

31 Suah, Interview.
32 Rev Thomas Mung, Pastor Chin Christian Church Melbourne, Interview with Meewon Yang, Footscray, 29 August 2014.
coming here from refugee camps, Malaysia and India. They are also concerned about those who remain in their homeland and frequently provide for their needs. Churches in Australia are constantly being asked for donations from those in Burma. Individual members “here in the lucky country” are expected to financially support families, churches and missionaries “back home.” This is part of “mission through” Karen and Chin and keeps a connection with a needy mission area, but also puts pressure on local church finances, particularly financial support of the pastor.\(^{33}\) It also potentially limits the vision for local and global mission that reaches beyond their own cultural group(s).

**Mission by and beyond Karen and Chin**

Mission for Diaspora groups involves mission “to” people who come to our context, mission “through” them to their own people here and abroad, but also mission by and beyond them – to other cultural groups in their neighbourhoods and for mission globally. Mission by and beyond Karen and Chin people happens as they engage in cross-cultural mission themselves.

There is a growing interest among Chin and Karen churches for the witness through them to their new adopted community. Even when their English is limited, Karen and Chin believers often see their way-of-life and their work as a witness to Christ. Many are eager to learn how to appropriately witness to neighbours. They see this as part of the purpose God has brought them to Australia. While it is challenging for them to adapt and they still feel very strong links to their homelands, this sense of purpose gives them hope. Rev Ronald Lal Din Suah said: “When we come here, many people think that God is leading us, using the ‘primitive’ people to preach to the ‘civilized’ people … if we think that way it helps our mission work, it gives us more meaning.”\(^{34}\) At this time the needs of their own people are great and most of their energy and effort is going into their community ministry. However they look forward to a time when they are able to broaden their mission. Lung Ceu reflected: “Our hope for the future to be able to work in Australia, but at the moment we are very very small, and really need to look after our people first. But this is what we hope for.”\(^{35}\) They recognise the mission field they now live among in Australia and look forward to the ways that God may use them here.

---

33 Chris Barnden, Email to Darren Cronshaw and Meewon Yang, 1 September 2014.
34 Suah, Interview.
35 Lung Ceu, Advisor (deacon), Australia Zophei Chin Baptist Church, Interview with Stacey Wilson, August 2014.
The youth pastor of Victorian Chin Baptist Church in Mooroolbark ran an innovative outreach event a few years ago – a Burmese cultural evening with food and entertainment, widely advertised throughout the community, showcasing Chin culture and making contact with hundreds of Australian neighbours. This event was helpful for celebrating Chin culture among Chin young people but it also helped the church to connect with its broader community and helped the community to understand Chin culture and faith.

As well as local outreach, as Karen and Chin churches mature, they want to develop as mission-sending churches. We need principles for training and commissioning Karen and Chin believers for mission beyond their own cultural groups. Diaspora missiology involves a multi-dimensional approach; from and to every nation and not merely from the West to the rest. In God’s economy, migrants are often able to reach other cultures that Westerners are less able to connect with, thus functioning as “bridge peoples.” Payne is optimistic about the mission potential of migrants, refugees and students. He uses the acronym REPS to discuss how to Reach, Equip, Partner and Send. Mobilising a migrant group for mission may involve sending missionaries back to their own people, but it may also involve sending them to other cultural contexts.\footnote{36 J D Payne, Strangers Next Door: Immigration, Migration and Mission (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012); reviewed by Darren Cronshaw, in Mission Studies 31 (2014), 467-468.}

For Karen and Chin churches in Victoria, it feels like early days and most new migrants are focused on settling rather than thinking about going overseas again. In 10-15 years time pastors hope they will be able to send some of their young people, and hope to see some committed to mission work in mission or Asia but they do not feel they are yet in that position.\footnote{37 Suah, Interview.} There are four Mizo missionary couples from India working with the Baptist mission Global Interaction in Asia.\footnote{38 Baraden, Interview.} There are not yet many (or perhaps any) missionaries from Australian Karen and Chin churches serving overseas. Many people support Karen or Chin missionaries in Myanmar, but not yet their own missionaries from here to other countries.

Saw Ner Dah embodies the passion for mission by and beyond diaspora groups from Burma. He describes how Myanmar Baptist Convention (MBC) aims to grow in holistic mission and engage in international mission.\footnote{39 Dah, "Reading the Kingdom 'Teaching," 49.} He also challenges the churches to move beyond being defensive and inward looking and to be open, inclusive
communities. From his reading of Matthew and Kingdom ethics, his conclusions include a call to holistic mission beyond themselves:

We need to maintain the vision of inviting all to follow Jesus, even though the natural tendency is to hide away for survival and draw the boundaries more clearly against the enemy. ... We need to continue to care for the displaced, the imprisoned, the hungry, the ill, the homeless, the refugees and those whose hope is being smashed, for in this we are caring for Christ himself and being the salt and light of the gospel.\footnote{Dah, "Reading the Kingdom Teaching," 302.}

**Leadership and mission training**

There is a lot that the broader Australian church can learn from Karen and Chin churches, but Karen and Chin churches may also be able to learn from others in the broader church about cross-cultural mission – both to faithfully witness to their new Aussie neighbours, and to mobilise and send missionaries to other contexts.

Many Chin and Karen local church lay leaders come from a rural background and out of need are thrust into leadership in Australian churches. This is a positive trend for their inclusion and experience. They also, however, need training and resourcing for their new roles.\footnote{Dah, "Reading the Kingdom Teaching," 303.} Karen and Chin churches welcome input on leadership and teamwork. BUV training days for Karen and Chin leaders have covered topics such as leadership in multicultural Australia, hearing about migrant experiences and successful stories, Duty of Care, Financial Management, building broader Burmese community networks and celebrating diversity and unity. BUV also hosts Karen and Chin Pastors' Network meetings that function as a peer-support group over a meal sharing stories and resources, especially about spirituality, advocacy and social enterprise. Apart from the value of learning, bringing these leaders together in one place is powerful for mutual encouragement.

Another critical area of training that needs development is training for mission. Karen and Chin churches in Victoria are often strong in community and highly committed to worshipping together, usually multiple times a week, but this limits opportunities for developing English language proficiency and building relationships with other Australians. Karen and Chin believers need a new understanding of what mission is – in terms of their own local witness and not just sending finance for others to do

\footnote{Barnden, Interview.}
mission. Pastors encourage people to live their lives as Christians and if people ask, say and show you are a Christian. Language continues to be a big barrier for many. Pastors hope the second generation will grow in local mission awareness and practice better. Because BUV Karen and Chin leaders’ training days and pastors’ networks are eagerly welcomed and are so well attended, these gatherings may be ideal forums to continue to explore how best to foster mission to, through, and by and beyond the margins of this Diaspora community.

Conclusion

Karen and Chin Baptist churches in Victoria are still young and face many challenges – helping find work for the unemployed, helping newcomers adapt to the new environment and cultures, negotiating a relationship with English-speaking churches, navigating role expectations for pastors and leaders including women, and watching the second generation being attracted to things other than church. However, these churches are growing and demonstrating tenacity in faith and have a lot to teach other established Australian churches. Is this part of the purpose of their migration to Australia? Or do they also have a role in cooperating with God in reaching not just their own people but other Australians of diverse cultures.

Rev Suah says he has a sense of destiny that God has sent them here, because God has something for them to do. It is not just Burmese politics, action of UNHCR or leftover Karma punishment or reward, but relocation to Australia is part of God’s purpose. The Western world is declining in Christianity. He shares a sense of destiny with a growing number of other Chin and Karen leaders that “God is sending us back to evangelise Australia, to evangelise the West who evangelised us” and that is part of why “God has called us here for a reason.”

43 Bardeen, Interview.
44 Suah, Interview.
In these pages you will find exceptionally rich and deep thinking about the profoundly important concept of mission on, to, from and with the margins of society. As disciples of the God who chose, and still chooses, to live among the lowly, the displaced and the excluded, it is in the margins we must contemplate, find discernment, show hospitality and build the kingdom. These writings both inspire and challenge, and they form a fitting tribute to Ross Langmead, who always sought justice and completeness, and who thought and taught, loved and lived so well.

Rev Tim Costello, Chief Executive Officer, World Vision Australia

We are Pilgrims is a superb collection of essays and reflections gathered in honour of Ross Langmead—and it does him proud. It's a remarkable collection, reflecting the wide interests and skills of the man himself. There are scholarly explorations of our diverse, multicultural and supposedly secular age, analysing the implications and challenges for Christian mission today. There are richly personal stories of marginalisation and the discovery of faith and hope amidst suffering and alienation. The experience of indigenous and immigrant Australians is given richly personal space and honour, alongside the issues of church life and the questions of faith in a 'post-Christian' society.

For all the breadth and immensity of these issues, however, the essays are short and eminently readable—and important element making this book widely accessible, another Ross Langmead skill! Colleagues and former students alike have joined here to honour Ross and to press forward with his invitation to live and serve as pilgrims on mission.

Congratulations to Darren Cronshaw and Rosemary Dewerce on this excellent contribution.

Rev Dr Frank Rees, Principal, Wintey College

The framework for this book was developed by Ross Langmead himself in 2009 and is as appropriate now as it was then. The book considers five areas of challenge for contextual mission to be effective: indigenous reconciliation; a multicultural vision; mission in a post-Christian society; engaging the postmodern mind; and the Asian horizon. While these are worked out in the Australian context, the book has a wider appeal as these are common issues for the mission agenda in our world today. The essays offer deep theological reflection along with stories and case studies to engage and challenge the reader to work for justice and reconciliation, practise hospitality and, above all, to effect real human flourishing.

Dr Cathy Ross, General Secretary of International Association for Mission Studies and Tutor in Contextual Theologies at Ripon College Cuddesdon and CMS

WE ARE PILGRIMS
Mission from, in and with the Margins of our Diverse World

Edited by Darren Cronshaw and Rosemary Dewerce
WE ARE PILGRIMS
Mission from, in and with the Margins of our Diverse World
Edited by Darren Cronshaw and Rosemary Dewerse
Appreciation to CBM Australia

We appreciate the generous sponsorship of CBM Australia of this book, and of the fourth annual Australian Association for Mission Studies conference, October 2014, which inspired and gave content for the book.

Formerly known as Christian Blind Mission, over time CBM's work has widened from serving just people with vision impairment to giving all people with disabilities access to basic healthcare services and restoring life. They are also involved in providing immediate aid in times of emergency, long-term support where needed, and advocacy, all in partnership with local organisations, governments and agencies. Today CBM is the world's largest Christian organisation working in over 70 countries with people with disabilities in the most marginalised places.

Committed also to working with Australian local churches and other Christian organisations interested in ministry on the margins and with people of diverse abilities, CBM's sponsorship of this volume is a logical and welcomed partnership.

Because of CBM's sponsorship, *We are Pilgrims* is available for free distribution as an EBook. Go to https://www.cbm.org.au
Dedicated to

Dr Ross Langmead

Professor of Mission Studies, Whitley College, University of Divinity

Convenor and Founding Secretary, Australian Association for Mission Studies

Ross was married to Alison (for 40 years),

proud father to Benjamin and Kia,

and grandfather to Sage and Zara, those who miss him most;

but those of us who appreciated his warm interest,

thoughtful mind and his commitment to journeying Jesus’ way of love also miss him,

and continue to be inspired by his life well lived.
Contents

Foreword
Alison Langmead 9

Introduction
Darren Cronshaw and Rosemary Dewerse 13

Margins and Mission
1. Standing Fast and Breaking Through: Challenges and Possibilities for Marginal Ministry
   Anthony J. Gittins, CSSp. 27
2. Finding the Centre at the Margins: Renewing the Call to Mission
   Anthony J. Gittins, CSSp. 39

A. Indigenous Reconciliation
3. Finding our Soul, Finding my Soul: Walking the Long Journey of Reconciliation in Australia
   Rosemary Dewerse 57

B. A Multicultural Vision
   George Wieland 71
5. Growing a Truly Multicultural Australian Catholic Church
   Noel Connolly 83
   Samuel Chan with Kim Chan 97
7. Becoming a Diverse Multicultural Church in Central Adelaide. A Case Study
   Elizabeth Vreugdenhil 111
C. Mission in a Post-Christian Society

8. But is it Church?
   Karyl Davison 127

9. Where the Margins Meet: An Exploration of the Prophetic
   Dimensions of a Church Willing to Embrace
   Jasmine Dow 139

10. Grappling for Christ: Incarnational Mission at the Margins of the Church
     Mick Pope 151

11. On the Journey to New Creation: Mission with People with Disabilities
    Immanuel Koks 165

D. Engaging the postmodern mind

12. A Mutual Understanding, Emerging Spirituality and the Christian Church
    Christy Capper 179

13. There is No Public Square, The Secularist Myth of Neutral Ground
    Lewis Jones 193

    of De-centred Mission in the 21st Century
    T. Mark McConnell 207

E. The Asian Horizon

15. Christians in the City: Challenges to Faith and
    Mission in the First “Urban Century”
    Ash Barker 225

16. A World of Peripheries
    Scott Litchfield 233

17. Contextual Theologising on the Doorstep of Asia: Mission and
    Marginalisation among the Irupara Hula People of PNG
    Graeme Humble 245

18. “God called us here for a reason” Karen and Chin Baptist Churches
    in Victoria: Mission from the Margins of a Diaspora Community
    Darren Cronshaw, Stacey Wilson and Meewon Yang, with Ner Dah, Si Khia,
    Arohn Kuung, and Japheth Lian 263

19. A Korean Woman: A Marginal Perspective for a Multicultural Society
    Pauline Kim van Dalen 279

Contributors 293