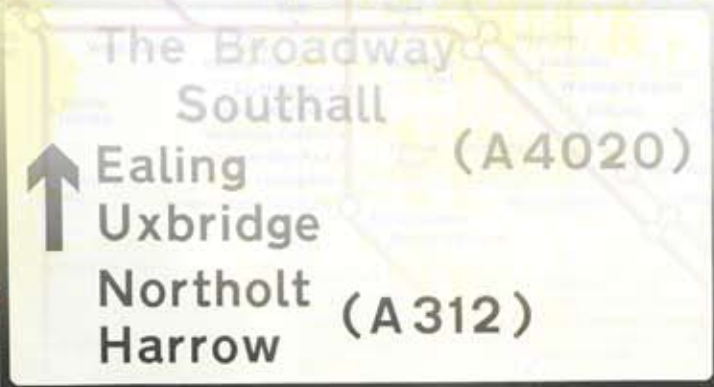


CROSS-CULTURAL Mission in Britain



Mission is no longer perceived as being 'from the Christian West to the Non-Christian Rest' – it's now truly from everywhere to everywhere.

Interserve has traditionally worked cross-culturally with people in Asia and the Arab world, but one of the effects of globalisation is the scattering of these people groups across the world, and their relocation to such geographically diverse countries as Australia, Canada and the United Kingdom. Interserve has acknowledged this by amending its statement of purpose to include *'the peoples of Asia and the Arab world'*. Drawing from its experience gained in working cross-culturally in their countries of origin, it is ideally placed to engage with these new diaspora communities.

Interserve England and Wales made one of the first efforts to engage with these communities by forming Urban Vision

to work in places like south London and Lancashire. **Urban Vision** now has about 25 partners placed from Gravesend to Cardiff to Leicester, matching Interserve's work in Bangladesh in size. The partners are from a range of ethnic groups themselves, such as Anglo-Saxon, Pakistani, Sikh, Korean and Australian.

Urban Vision exists to facilitate cross-cultural ministry among the visible minorities in Britain, i.e. people from Asian, Middle Eastern and North African cultural and religious backgrounds. The aim of the Urban Vision network is to help these non-Western Britons to hear and understand the Gospel, to have the chance to be transformed by Jesus Christ and to find fellowship in culturally inclusive churches.

As Interserve's purpose is to help build up the local church, Urban Vision provides training, resources, and advice and guidance from experienced practitioners, to enable church groups to reach out to people from other cultures and faith backgrounds. The main thrust of Urban Vision activities is:

- **Education** of the churches (equipping them for cross-cultural ministry);

- **Evangelism** of individuals, families and communities;
- **Cooperation** between churches and mission agencies in networking and consultation; and
- **Placement** of skilled workers in urban areas with a significant multi-cultural population.

Gender

Cross-cultural issues are part and parcel of problems faced within the diaspora communities in the UK, many of which involve gender (socially defined differences between men and women). Cultural beliefs about the role and value (or lack thereof) of women sometimes lead to all varieties of abuse. Not just abuse of women by men – though this is certainly to the fore – but also the injustices and abuse that can arise from mother-in-law to daughter-in-law, or amongst other family members. In Bangladesh we witnessed a mother beating her son for giving blood to save his wife's life, rebuking him with "Why did you do that? If she died, you could have got a new wife" (with the dowry that implies!).

"If we don't take the gospel to them, they will come to us looking for it." Brother Andrew

Christ's mission in these situations is to call the whole family to Himself. It is not to set men against women, but to empower both men and women to build up their family in Him so that all in the family are valued and cherished, and know His saving grace.

Arranged or forced

Marriage is God's core relationship in the family. Each partner must, to some extent, leave their parents to cleave to the other. Western culture has accentuated the leaving and based the cleaving on romantic love and attraction. Other cultures place the arranging of marriage in the hands of the family, and often the leaving for the man is a longer, slower process. Both systems work, and both systems have failures. Family

arranged marriages are as loving, strong, problematic and weak as romantic marriage.

Arranged marriages can be real expressions of the body of Christ. Let me be clear – arranged marriages are not 'forced' marriages. However, in a small percentage of cases this line is crossed when abuse and coercion are used to force a marriage to happen. The pressures can be immense, with motivations ranging from a desperate desire to maintain face, or ethnic purity, to 'selling' visa access to someone from the old country. The problem is significant enough in the UK that the government has set up the Forced Marriage Unit, which investigates about 400 cases each year. The risks of forced marriages amongst immigrants from




Sally is an Interserve partner with Urban Vision. She lives in the increasingly multicultural Medway towns in South East England and works part-time as a nurse in General Practice. The nursing brings her into contact with such local minority communities as South Asians, East Europeans and Africans.

These communities desire to access the benefits of the West yet also preserve their own culture. For instance, South Asians will often send their children back to Asia to marry, or bring marriage partners over from Asia, in an attempt to keep their cultural norms for marriage and family life. This setup – uprooting people from one culture and transplanting them into another – sometimes

works very well, but at other times the consequences are traumatic for everyone involved. The following stories from Sally about Seema, Aliah, Kuldip and Preeti highlight some of the tragedies that can occur.

Sally spends most of her time modelling cross-cultural friendship in a largely polarised society – which is, she thinks, what Jesus would do. “We live in a melting-pot of political correctness and resentments in our post-Christian secular society, and those of us who work cross-culturally are in a privileged position to be able connect with people of faith, and to sensitively bring the true claims of Christ into the arena of debate.”



Kuldip, a Punjabi Christian girl, was brought over to the UK for marriage to Stephen, the youngest child of a Punjabi Catholic family. Stephen enjoyed all the pampering that went along with the wedding plans for an only son, both in India and in England, but soon after Kuldip arrived, he moved out of the family home. He refuses to talk about a future with Kuldip, saying that it was his mother who wanted the arranged marriage, not him, and he couldn't go through with it. Meanwhile Kuldip, who cannot speak English and is struggling to come to terms with massive cultural changes, lives with his mother. They are both devastated and are praying Stephen will have a change of heart.

Preeti was born in the northern UK to Sikh parents; her father was an alcoholic, who had sexually abused her. She was sent to India for marriage, but returned alone because her husband had no visa. After visiting her husband in India, she became pregnant, which enraged her father, and he would beat her. After the baby was born he threatened to kill both her and the child. She escaped, was placed in a refuge, and had to move eight times because her family kept tracking her down. Then when her husband obtained his visa, he came to live with her – but he, too, had a drinking problem, and turned violent. She left him to go into hiding again, but they reconciled after their second child was born. Efforts are now being made to secure her husband's deportation on the grounds of child abuse.

Seema was brought over from Punjab about three years ago to be married to a young Sikh man, who had been born in the UK. They soon had a baby, but not long afterwards, Seema discovered her husband was having an affair. When she confronted him he didn't bother to deny it – and his mother told Seema that if she didn't like it she could return to India, but she had to leave her baby behind! In her powerlessness she turned to an Asian advocacy agency for help but there was little they could do for her.

Seventeen-year-old Aliah is a Muslim, who came over from Bangladesh to be married to a British Asian. She was brought to Sally's English class by her mother-in-law, and really enjoyed it. She was an avid reader with a basic book knowledge of English, but no confidence in speaking it. The following week, she came fully veiled with only her eyes visible – this is not a common practice in the community. A couple of weeks later she stopped coming altogether, and could not be contacted. Sometime afterwards, Sally was told the rest of the story: Aliah had been virtually confined to the house by her mother-in-law. When Aliah, very frustrated with her life, tried to ring her family in Bangladesh, her mother-in-law disconnected the phone. Her alarmed family dispatched a male family member to 'sort things out', and Aliah was extracted from the house. Rescued from one kind of prison, Aliah will probably spend the rest of her days in domestic chores, living with her family, as it will be difficult to arrange another marriage for her. ☹

the Indian subcontinent, and especially those from Pakistan and Bangladesh, have prompted the UK government to bar teenage brides and bridegrooms from entering the country, and to raise the minimum age for a marriage visa from 18 to 21. Also, in the near future, a British citizen going abroad with the intention of marrying may be required to declare it before leaving the UK. The new rules, which will affect only immigrants from outside the European Union, are expected to come into force by the end of the year.

Mission in this context

The issue of forced marriages and the fallout from them, is one faced by Urban Vision partners. Supporting victims (some of whom may be moved from refuge to refuge), speaking up for justice, and working to demonstrate God's plan for marriage are all part of mission in this context. All the while we seek to openly express Jesus as our motivator and source, but with sensitivity and grace.

My role as Team Leader with Urban Vision is just beginning: my family and I spent the last 15 years as partners in Bangladesh. But I am realising that cross-cultural mission is just as necessary here as it is in Bangladesh, or in any of the Asian or Arab countries that Interserve works in. And I'm encouraged by the fact that the Urban Vision team, so diverse in nature and experienced in years, is very well placed to make a difference for Christ.



No longer is mission from the West to the rest, but from everywhere to everywhere. This is a challenge that also needs to be taken up in New Zealand, where cross-cultural mission has stayed small and static. In contrast, according to Census statistics, the Muslim community alone grew from 23,637 in 2001 to 35,856 in 2006: an increase of over 12,000 in just five years. Where are the cross-cultural workers who will take the message of Christ to the immigrant residents of New Zealand? "How can they believe in Him if they have not heard His message? How can they hear if no one tells the Good News?" (Romans 10:14). ☹

Colin Edwards is a New Zealander who serves with Interserve England and Wales as the Team Leader of Urban Vision.