

Just like Jesus: an insight to the development of a multicultural mindset in our Lutheran schools

Eloise Beveridge

In January 2000 I began my journey in Lutheran Education in regional South Australia. At the time I could never have imagined that twenty years later I would have had the privilege to serve in three of our colleges in three different states! Having returned home to Brisbane in 2005, my family and I made the 'dust change', as we affectionally call it, and moved to Mildura in 2019 to serve as principal at Trinity Lutheran College.

Prior to commencing in our schools my experience of our system was through that of my cousins who attended a small suburban Brisbane Lutheran Primary School in the 1980s and 90s.

When I reflect on my experiences in our schools, I have been a member of three vastly different yet uniquely similar communities. In each community I have been connected and surrounded by the ultimate love of our Lord, Jesus Christ. I have been able to walk alongside staff, students and families, sharing their journey and their paths in life. In each location I have seen the gospel at work, I have seen grace in action and I have seen faith lived. I have seen hope!

Now more than ever, in a world that is changing daily, a Covid existence shaping our lives and conditioning us to a way of living that only eighteen months ago would have made many of us laugh at the suggestion, we need the gift of hope.

I am not the 'traditional congregation member'. I am not always in attendance at a Sunday service, my family is busy and work and life commitments for us means the tradition of a weekly service isn't always an option. I know that this has not always been perceived by some as the 'done thing'. I know that I have been judged at times and have been told that I am not 'Christian enough' but I also know that some of my most life changing and faith strengthening moments have been when I have been alongside others, in the trenches so to speak, when they have needed a hand or when I have had a hand extended to me.

I am passionate about our schools; I am passionate about the role of mission and ministry in our schools, and I am passionate about my own faith journey. Who I am and how I grow spiritually may just be a little different from you.

This is the same analogy that I use to describe the changing face of our Lutheran schools and what this means for the development of a multicultural mindset for our church. At Trinity Lutheran College Mildura, we have an enrolment of 492 students from Prep to Year 10, and an incredible staff of sixty-two. Our students and staff represent twenty-three different countries of origin, and we speak thirty different languages between us. We have

families of Buddhist, Greek Orthodox, Hindu, Islam, Muslim, Sikh and Christian faith. We have families who do not identify a faith background.

Our college is welcoming, our college is inviting, and our college accepts everyone.

This multicultural and inclusive setting can, for some, be unsettling. Our schools have not always been such multicultural settings. Our schools have not always had such vast world religions and experiences as the backgrounds of our families. Our schools are a place of hope, a place where people can come and be accepted, a place where people can be connected, a place where people can be loved, a place where we value learning. This is no different for us as a church.

Tragically, our college lost a student to a motor vehicle accident in very difficult circumstances a few years ago. I have never known a God more loving, a God more accepting or a God more forgiving than at that moment. A Buddhist family, our college was asked by them to pray as a part of the funeral service for their daughter. Our college became a place of outreach to young students and their families. A place to try and make sense of this accident. A place to seek refuge and support from one another and from God. Our college has remained in contact and in support of this family and this year, welcomed the younger sibling to our learning community. The role of our schools and our church in reaching out, in getting into the trenches, walking alongside our sisters and brothers is no more raw than this!

Our college embraces the diversity, the rich learning and the opportunity to develop friendships and support networks from such a diverse and culturally precious community. Our parents have a prayer group, our classrooms have features labelled in the mother tongue languages of our students, our library continues to grow our collections of resources to support and grow our cultural diversity and our inquiry learning experiences explore and celebrate the amazing cultural dimensions of our community. Our worship services are attended by family members of our students and our Christian Studies program remains founded in Lutheran theology. Through acceptance, through connection and through relationships our community works together. We value one another and we value our religion.

It was not that long ago that my nine-year-old daughter shared with my husband and I over the dinner table all about Ramadan and the importance of this religious celebration to her little friend from school. She then went on to tell us the differences and similarities between her Christian faith and that of her friend, finishing with the statement that, 'we are the same, Mumma, even though we have a different God, we want to help other people.'

In my opinion, that is our challenge; for us as a church and for us as schools. In the contemporary world in which we live, in a world where 'church' and 'religion' is facing change, in a world where multicultural integration is to be celebrated, in a world that needs us to adjust our mindset...how do we *walk* our faith, *talk* our faith and *be* our faith?

For me, this challenge is all about humanising Jesus. Walking alongside our brothers and sisters, getting in the trenches when we need to, helping and supporting one another, living our grace and sharing our hope. It gets messy at times, even a little ugly, but at its core it is about accepting one another. It is about listening and letting go of our

judgements. It is about growing in our own faith and being strong enough in our beliefs to reach out. It is living our faith every day. Just like Jesus.

Eloise Beveridge is Principal at Trinity Lutheran College, Mildura, Victoria.