

Cultural Convergence

Lessons from ministering cross-culturally and across generations

By Debbie Schwartz

My husband Rob and I along with our three boys live and minister in Seattle among a diverse ethnic population. Part of the challenge of ministering cross-culturally and across generations is understanding and experiencing the intrinsic cultural values that identify an ethnic group. The cultural root is always there but the level of awareness of these cultural values will vary from generation to generation and according to the ethnic group.

For Asian Americans, the two main cultural roots are **omoiyari**, which is empathy or the ability and willingness to feel what others are feeling, and **guan xi**, relational connections in a social order. These translate to relationships, understanding, respect, and belonging being high cultural values. Measuring a leader is based on the quality of relationship. In other words, the messenger is as important or more important than the message. Confrontation, losing face and shame are to be avoided.

What are the implications of understanding intrinsic cultural values and the way we do ministry? One of the high ministry values in the Navigators is the one-to-one ministry. How do we minister one-to-one among a people group who intrinsically need to avoid confrontation? Another high ministry value in the Navigators is serving, yet for Asian Americans one of the strategies to overcome shame is through performance. How can deeply shame based people be released from doing and be set free to serve in His Spirit?

We have learned to view relationships in a non-linear way. Instead of face-to-face appointments we want to meet side-by-side and look to the Father's face together. As we look to Him, He draws us together. Living out the value of praying with one another "side-by-side" and "to the Father" opens up doors to the hearts Asian Americans. We are experiencing how prayer is a means of helping grow loving relationships with our Father and each other.

We see that we must become like the man who knocks on his friend's door at midnight in Luke 11:5-8. The man was persistent because he was desperate. The word persistence or importunity literally means shamelessness. How can a shame based people come to the Father with shamelessness? As an Asian American, I admit I would not be willing to go knocking at my neighbor's door at midnight, instead I would make sure I have at least three loaves of bread in my freezer. "Face" and self-sufficiency hinders prayer but brokenness, humility and dependence on a loving Father allows prayer to flow

We are beginning to see the Lord break through walls of shame and bring His Asian American children to His throne of grace. The Lord has been growing our Seattle AAM team to long for Him in prayer. He has given us a prayer ministry at our Asian American church and has surrounded us with incredible people of prayer. As He enables us to persist in prayer "those who look to Him are radiant; their faces are never covered with shame."

These are some of the lessons the Lord has been teaching us in our journey of ministering cross-culturally and across generations.