

Case Study

Cherrydale Baptist Church Ministry to Immigrants



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Cherrydale Baptist Church, located in the Washington DC area, has the world at its doorstep. People from all over the world live near Cherrydale, and many of the internationals who come have not been exposed to the gospel and often have never even met a Christian. By reaching out to internationals relationally, Cherrydale’s ministry to immigrants is an opportunity to share the Gospel of Christ with these newcomers.

You are in Arlington, Virginia so that is a very unique situation in terms of the proximity to Washington DC and the Northern Virginia area. How did you all feel God was calling you to respond to this need?

I think it just began with observation. Our church is multi-ethnic, so we realized that our church is just a reflection of the diversity that exists in Arlington. I personally have many neighbours that are from all around the world from Ghana, India, Pakistan, Lebanon, and Tajikistan. So I just started communicating that from the pulpit when I had the opportunity. Another thing that we noticed is that we have ethnic restaurants everywhere. I just made it a principle that if I ever had a ministry meeting we couldn’t go to an American restaurant. We have all these ethnic restaurants so I took people to restaurants like Bengali and Thai and Turkish and Lebanese. It just started exposing people. I mentioned to them to look at people who are working here and people who come here. That is what got us on the path of just observing that God has brought the nations or many of the nations to us in Arlington and how should we respond to it.

That’s right. That’s pretty neat—taking people to the restaurants. Are there any statistics on how many non-Americans are living in your Zip Code?

I have a statistics for Arlington County. Arlington County is apparently the smallest county in the United States; it is only 26 square miles. It is a small county but 28 percent of the population of 208,000 is foreign born. They come from 125 different countries. And the Arlington public schools serve students that have 98 different languages as their first language. The top five were Spanish, which is not a surprise, but then the next four are Amharic, Arabic, Urdu and Bengali.

One thing that has helped highlight our church’s internationals outreach program, is that our missions policy for over 20 years has had the unreached people groups as its focus and these languages like Arabic and Urdu and Bengali just highlights them. So it was fascinating to note that we have people from unreached people groups living right among us. This has been motivating for our congregation. Another statistic that was interesting for our congregation to know is that we have more Mongolians than Mexicans in Arlington. Arlington is supposed to have one of the largest populations



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of Mongolians in the US. There are 5,000 living in Arlington and 10,000 in the Metro DC area.

When it comes to refugees, the largest intake coming into Arlington are from Iraq, Afghanistan, and Bhutan. Those from Bhutan are ethnically Nepalese but they were pushed out of Bhutan in a kind of an ethnic cleansing when they didn't want non-Bhutanese living in that country. Nepalese who had been living there for a long time were pushed out, and we have a number of them coming to Arlington.

So you saw the need and how did you meet it and was there any big strategy?

We have a multipronged approach. The most fruitful ministry we have is called the Chinese Bible Study. They meet at our church every Friday night. They reach Chinese students and visiting professors from local universities mainly George Washington University and some from Georgetown. Those are the two main ones.

Chinese believers in our church lead this outreach. They run the whole thing—they have a dinner together, a worship time

Our biggest obstacle for our church is busyness. So our biggest challenge is getting our congregation to put margin in their life so that they have time to reach out to international refugees.

together and breakup into different Bible studies. Evangelistic Bible studies for people who are not believers yet, Discipleship Bible studies for people who are believers. Every year, through that, they see anywhere from five to 15 people come to be saved and get baptized. Connected to that we have

something called Friendship Partners. That is where these Chinese students in the Chinese Bible Study who want to be connected with an American who can teach them about American culture; take them around sightseeing and things.

So we get people from our church who are willing to be a Friendship Partner for the school year. Chinese believers who are leading it get other members of our congregation involved as well. This has really been a fruitful ministry. It has been going on for about 15 years maybe even 20.

We started partnership with a Thai church in the area that needed a location to meet so we offered them some rooms in our facility. We put their church's website on our website. We promote it so that Thais living in the area are exposed to it. Our church members know that so when they meet Thais, or they have Thai neighbors, they expose them to the church making them aware of it. We are also in contact with a Mongolian church about doing the same thing. We are probably still a month or two away but it's looking like we will be able to offer them space in our building as well. So we will have a Thai church and a Mongolian church.

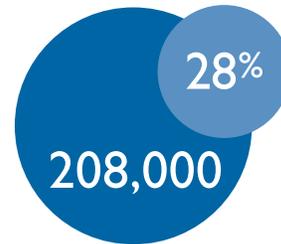
We started a refugee ministry a couple of years ago. This is one area where we haven't gotten much traction yet. We have maybe seven to 10 people in our church who have been involved with it. There are two organizations in the area that process refugees, i.e. Catholic Charities and Lutheran Social Services. Catholic Charities is here in Arlington and Lutheran Services is in Fairfax County.

We have quite a lot of people coming from Fairfax County to our church. For people who want to get connected with refugees they need to go through a two-hour training through either one of those organizations. Then they are able to say I would like to be connected with the refugee and both these organizations give them several ways they can serve. Whether it's a conversational English partner, helping them write job resumes, look for jobs, or teaching them how to function in American society – buy a bus ticket, use a credit card, shop at a grocery store—they have various ways that you can make yourself available to serve. The trained volunteers will say I would like to do one of these two or three things and I would like a refugee living in this area usually close to where they live and they get connected with the refugee family.

Doug Batson from our church headed up a church working team of about four or five

people and they produced something we call *Ethnic Embrace Arlington*. It is a book that lists the 20 largest ethnic groups in Arlington. It gives some information about the people, their country, how they can pray for them and where you can go to meet the nationals here. It is in alphabetical order so the first one is Afghanistan: You can go to Afghan Kebab or Bamiyan—restaurants where all the workers are from Afghanistan. We gave it out to our congregation just as a way to say, "Hey, we have the nations living among us, find one that you are interested in, pray for them and seek to meet people from that country."

This idea came across my path with the book, *Ethnic Embrace Chicago* that was produced by YWAM missionaries. It was very impressive and I wrote to them and asked is they would mind if we made one for Arlington. They said their vision was that



In Arlington County 28% of the population of 208,000 is foreign born.

people around America would produce one for their area so they were really very helpful. They sent us all kind of templates, so it really helped us to get jumpstarted on doing it.

Have you had any obstacles to any of this outreach?

Yes, our biggest obstacle for our church is busyness. Lots of people here have pretty demanding careers. When they are not working they make their schedules busy with all other kinds of good things. So our biggest challenge is getting our congregation to put margin in their life so that they have time to reach out to international refugees. I haven't been able to crack that nut. I still run up against that all the time.

Another challenge we found with particularly our refugee ministry is that they all have to work very long hours. Most of them have to work entry-level jobs even though they were professionals in their home country. They are working entry level jobs in this area at very high cost of living so they



must work 12 to 14 hours a day and are still struggling to make ends meet. It's very hard to find time that they are able to meet. Those are two main or two big hurdles.

What are the principles that you have learnt that might be transferable?

I think one principle is trying to emphasise that lots of the internationals and refugees feel lonely, feel isolated so the principle of friendship—of making yourself available to them and you showing them love and kindness and respect. Just that principle of friendship is so important, and how you treat people.

The second principle I think that we really learned from the Chinese Bible Study is the principle of sacrifice. They are amazing at how much comfort and time they sacrifice to serve the students that come in. And the third principle, I will say is prayer. We need devotion to prayer and praying for internationals and our witness to them. I think these principles will apply no matter what part of America people are reaching out to internationals.

How can a church learn about immigrant communities around them?

One of the ways that Doug and his team sought to find statistics was that they contacted the public schools and asked how many languages and how many internationals and non-America students they have. The Arlington Public School System was very helpful in giving out that information. He also looked at the US Census Bureau Statistics and Central Intelligence Agency World Fact book.

What I did personally, which was helpful, was I just visited a lot of ethnic restaurants and I would talk to people. I found one restaurant where almost all the waiters were the Nepalese from Bhutan. I didn't know that at that time, I just saw that they had different names and they looked different so I asked them where they were from and

they told me. I asked if a lot of others from their country were here and they said yes. They told me which part of the town they lived in. So I made it a principle that when I go to these restaurants I would talk to the waitress or waiter and find out where they are from and population from their country here and it was a great way to learn.

And then what would you say is the most compelling success story? Would it be your Chinese Bible study?

Yes I was going to say that clearly it has been the Chinese Bible Study. I think the reason they have such success is they have stuck with it year in and year out for a long period of time. They are very sacrificial in the use of their time in opening their homes. Every year they are very active in their witness so every year they are seeing people come to be saved, getting baptized, getting plugged in the churches. Most of them go back to China and get plugged into the house churches. There are two particular stories that would kind of highlight the effectiveness of this ministry.

The first one is that they do not even have to go on to campuses to recruit anymore. Before students in China even come to America they contact the Chinese Bible Study and say we have heard you help Chinese students and we are going to be coming to Washington DC. My flight arrives at this time; can someone be there to help me and pick me up from the airport?

Every school year about 100 to 150 students fly in and they house them temporarily for up to a week while they try to find them housing. Right then they are already plugged in. They pick them up at the airport, take them to their home and help them find housing and they say, "You know, on Friday nights we have a Bible Study and we have a meal together" and it's amazing how many of those students come. Its amazing to me that at this point they don't even have to make effort to have the students contact them before they have left China.

The other encouraging story is about a Chinese student who came to faith. She had a Friendship Partner that she met with regularly and she told the Friendship Partner that my parents are coming to visit would you pray with me for them. There is no way they are going to be open to the gospel, because my father is a card-carrying member of the Communist Party and they are very atheistic. They came and within a month her parents came to be saved and started attending church with her. They were here for two or three months and then went back to China. Within the first month or two they had gone to all of their friends, all of their neighbors and shared with them about how they met Christ while they were in America.

So some of their close network of people, friends and other family, came to faith and they got plugged in to an underground church. I thought this is the wonderful potential you see in our outreach to internationals. She still lives here and has married another Chinese student and they both have jobs. Their witness was to their parents who have gone back to China and are passing that on.

That's incredible. We thank the Lord for that. The last question is—Would you say that the Lord has used the ministry to change either you or your church and how?

Again, I think it is the Chinese Bible Study that has impacted our church. As our church has seen how sacrificially they've served, they've heard the story of one of the leaders of the Chinese Bible Study who had 20 students sleeping on their living room floor. Our church said, "We can help. We can put people in our house." Every year they see the Chinese Bible Study people coming to faith and getting baptized. It's really been an example to our church. And how comfort oriented we are. I think God has used the Chinese Bible Study to really be a great example to our church.

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