

## On Hospice and Home: Reflections on Next Generation Diaspora<sup>1</sup>

Lorajoy Tira-Dimangundayao<sup>2</sup> © 2022

### On Hospice and Home: Reflections on Next Generation Diaspora

I am a C&MA child—third generation, and fully indoctrinated.

But, at some point, I began to ask, “What is the point of what we do? Why are we so committed to the Great Commission? What is the point of it all?” I have heard my thoughts in the words of friends, who like me, have been raised with the privilege of Jesus-devoted families. But what is the point of it all? The point of our Alliance distinctive?

I would like to suggest to you, that the point is to make a *home*.

Anglican theologian, Miroslav Volf describes “home.”

“In the Jewish and Christian traditions, the object of hope expressed in the image of home is inextricably bound with transcendence: it is either God’s gift, or God’s very being, or, as we will argue, both God’s gift and God.”<sup>3</sup>

“At their best, homes are places where love, peace, and joy come together. In such homes, each rejoices over and each rejoices with all others, and all rejoice in their common social and material space; each loves others and is loved by them, and all tend to their common space; each individually and all together are at peace, enjoying and working to enhance the material and social circumstances that are their home.”<sup>4</sup>

In the household codes of the New Testament, we see a further development of the image of home: home for the Roman family is the domicile of the family—where the paterfamilias directs his household—in which his wife and children are actively involved in

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<sup>3</sup>Miroslav Volf, “The World as God’s Home: Lecture 1, Modern Homelessness,” *Edward Cadbury Lectures* (University of Birmingham, Birmingham, May 28, 2019, video, 6:04-6:28, <https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/schools/ptr/departments/theologyandreligion/events/cadburylectures/2019/index.aspx>).

<sup>4</sup>Ibid, 18:58-19:35.

the family enterprise. The household is synonymous with family business.<sup>5</sup> (We see this in some collective cultures, like those in the Philippines).

So, tied to the concept of home is family. The Christian family, my professor, David Goa, Canadian public theologian in the Orthodox tradition, writes, “Is concerned for growth into union with God and nurturing each family member’s capacity to love the life of the world. The spiritual life of the family is precisely to cultivate and nurture this capacity in the children, in each other and in the stranger.”<sup>6</sup>

Yet today, in the late modern period, many people are experiencing a sense of spiritual, emotional, and physical “homelessness.” Certainly, this is the case of the people on the move who have been uprooted or dislocated from their homelands.<sup>7</sup> The answer to this homelessness is the indwelling of God.

My memories begin in the late 1970’s aboard the “world’s largest floating bookstore,” the MV Logos. On the ocean, far away from my birth country, the Philippines, I learned to walk and talk, learning English first, before even my mother’s own tongue. My parents, a nursing instructor from the northern islands and an industrial engineer from the deep south who had met in Metro Manila as university students, had joined the Christian movement of Operation Mobilisation, committing to actively participate in “motivating and mobilising Jesus followers to live out His purposes.”<sup>8</sup>

The multigenerational and multi-accented residents of the MV Logos arrived from myriad of economic and socio-cultural backgrounds from all over the world. My nursery school teacher was a princess of Tonga and my best friend’s father, a doctor from the Netherlands. My parents’ best friend joined too. He operated a watch shop in Manila. The ship picked up more residents from ports scattered across the oceans, and though, apparently, it is a different type of experience now, then, in the 1970s and early 1980s, the residents lived together on “a dollar a day,” sharing what they had with each other and with the guests who embarked to visit the bookstore on board. My father jokes, “of all the Christian organisations, MV Logos, the commune-on-a-ship, was the hippiest of them all.”

These early memories of belonging to a family comprised of diverse individuals, eating communal dinners at galley tables, and sharing tasks of running the boiler room, cleaning toilets, and preparing meals for many, marked my mind and my heart. The *belonging* in that floating home, demanded replication in my future faith understanding and practice, and it defined my faith journey. Everything spiritual about me, features the realities and metaphors of family.

After two years of living on the ship (ages 1-3) and collecting over sixty stamps of entry in my Philippine passport, I moved with my parents to Regina, Saskatchewan. My

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<sup>5</sup> Margaret Y. MacDonald, “Kinship and Family in the New Testament World.” in *Understanding the Social World of the New Testament*, eds. Dietmar Neufeld and Richard E. DeMaris. (London: Routledge, 2010).

<sup>6</sup> David Goa, “Reflections on the Spiritual Vocation of Family,” *davidgoa.ca*, accessed September 28, <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5a7691c96957da992caf9f6e/t/5e44cea6907146602d6ccddc/1581567655939/Reflections+on+the+Spritual+Vocation+of+the+Family.pdf>, 14.

<sup>7</sup> See Miroslav Volf, “Modern Homelessness,” *Edward Cadbury Lectures 2019* and Hartmut Rosa. *The Uncontrollability of the World* (Medford, MA: Polity Press, 2020).

<sup>8</sup> “About OM Ships,” *OM Ships International* (OM.org), accessed October 1, 2021, <https://www.om.org/ships/about>.

father had been admitted into a divinity program at Canadian Theological Seminary as a foreign student, and my mother and I went along. At our port of entry in Calgary, Alberta, our two suitcases were stolen along with my father's briefcase containing "all the cash we had in the world." Hearing of our airport disaster, we were welcomed to Regina by the dean of students who ushered us into a charity-furnished apartment. The seminary community on Fourth Avenue and the church we joined in Hillsdale involved my parents, and I spent the next two years playing with Canadian-born and similarly transplanted children on the school campus and in the church facility. In Kindergarten, I learned to sing "God Save the Queen." If we were "foreigners" in Canada's Queen city, I did not notice. *Belonging* was a mark of *my home*.

Later in my childhood, I would witness and partake in family in yet another Canadian city—Edmonton, Alberta. Following my father's studies, my parents were called to intern with, then join the permanent staff at Millbourne Alliance Church (MAC), a primarily European-background congregation in south Edmonton. Their primary assignment was to provide spiritual direction for a growing community of international students and foreign-born New Canadians from the Philippines. At MAC, I met "white" men and women renamed *Tita, Tito, Lolo, and Lola* by the Filipinos they embraced, and for who they provided adoptive homes. Also at MAC, I witnessed my father and other Filipinos invited into leadership capacities, fully integrated into the spiritual and community life of the church. IF it was novel, in Canada's initially Euro-descent congregations, for members to intentionally go beyond "Canadian hospitality" to give New Canadians a place of genuine belonging, I was not aware.

My parents, devoted followers of Jesus, and the faith communities they collaborated with, recognised that people were alone and displaced, and the antidote for that displacement was *belonging* and *communitas*. [Communitas: simply put, Communitas was a term developed by cultural anthropologist, Victor W. Turner, referring to "an experience of oneness or unity felt by those sharing a rite-of-passage experience." Turner's wife, anthropologist Elizabeth Turner, extends his description. "*Communitas* is thus a gift from liminality, the state of being betwixt and between. During this time, people find each other to be just ordinary people after all, not the anxious prestige-seeking holders of jobs and positions they often seem to be. People see each other face to face."<sup>9</sup>

The model I have embraced is that of my parents' unconditional embrace of the Other. While some communities define themselves with lines of inclusion and exclusion, my parents' welcomed, "Join us at our table. Come as you are." It did not matter who they were. I have heard it said that the surest way to recognise authenticity is to first familiarise oneself with the genuine article. With the deep sense of *belonging* found in some communities, I can

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<sup>9</sup> *Communitas* was a term developed by cultural anthropologist, Victor W. Turner, referring to "an experience of oneness or unity felt by those sharing a rite-of-passage experience." (Victor W. Turner and Elizabeth Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture*, xxx. Turner's wife, anthropologist Elizabeth Turner, extends his description. "Communitas is thus a gift from liminality, the state of being betwixt and between. During this time, people find each other to be just ordinary people after all, not the anxious prestige-seeking holders of jobs and positions they often seem to be. And people like feeling this in themselves. People see each other face to face. All the little details matter." (Edith Turner, *Communitas: The Anthropology of Collective Joy*, 4).

say that I have encountered the true, and with this bona fide fellowship, I am intimately acquainted—I saw it in my parents lives and in the Jesus-followers around me. Investment was placed in relationships, and relationship, not numbers, was the agenda.

In the process of articulating my spiritual journey, I have noted how much of my memories are marked by the cultural liminality [state simply of being in between] of my childhood—raised in Canada but feeling “never Canadian enough.” Looking Filipino, but not accepted as a Filipino who knew the realities of Filipino life. Outside my home and away from my faith community, I was acutely aware of being an outsider at school and, to varying degrees, in my Edmonton communities.

Now, As an adult, I recognise the security that was afforded to me by the privileges of my upbringing, and I realise how this contrast of displacement and belonging has contributed to my own desire to call the “Outsider” into “family.” Shaped by the family that raised me, I recognise that the Church of Jesus is called to call in the Outsider, inviting them past a proverbial “welcome mat” into the collaborative life of family.

I am a member of one of Edmonton’s oldest Christian churches, Beulah Alliance Church (BAC), a hundred year old congregation that has since expanded to include a sizeable multicultural membership, Arabic and Spanish congregations, and a satellite congregation that is led by a pastor who arrived in Canada from Vietnam as an asylum-seeking child. In May 2021, BAC installed a second-generation Canadian of Korean descent, born in Vancouver, in the position of lead pastor. One of our executive pastors was born in Guatemala. The other is French Canadian.

Still, in many of the Canadian congregations I see, the board of elders is Euro-centric; the lay leadership remains predominantly of the dominant or majority culture. Further still, many Canadian congregations continue to grapple with the realities of generational drift and demographic shift. While some churches, including BAC, are attempting to employ a culturally hybrid model over a homogenous model—inviting people from diverse backgrounds to positions of leadership and responsibility, other congregations maintain a solidly monocultural leadership (even when New Canadians, or conversely “old-er” Canadians, sit in the pews.) Even, as we have seen 90% of the AWF inclusive membership is found in Africa, Asia, and Latin America<sup>10</sup>—and Jesus-followers from those continents worship sit in our pews.

Furthermore, as immigration levels in Canada continue to rise, mono-ethnic churches continue to propagate. Canadian Christians are representing more varied ethnocultural backgrounds, yet, in keeping silos, they remain isolated, and the Canadian Church fragmented. This development in the Canadian Church is reflected across Canadian society. Outside of local congregations, community demographics is changing, but are our Canadian communities moving beyond basic hospitality, answering the human need for belonging? I am not saying, let us rid ourselves of meaningful spaces in which our first generation can flourish. I am saying, that we must, in the image of home and family, intentionally work on our pathways of discipleship towards leadership. What I am referring to is intentional and

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<sup>10</sup> AWF Executive Committee, “Inclusive Membership (2019),” Global Assembly, *AWF Quadrennial Convocation 2021*, October 20, 2021. Guayaquil, Ecuador.

strategic discipleship. The image I want to give you is of the children of a household being trained to actively participate in the family business. This requires an openness from all sides

According to Statistics Canada, international migration accounted for 82.8% of all population growth (in Canada) during the first three months of 2019.<sup>11</sup> At what point, if ever, do these individuals find true *belonging*?<sup>12</sup> Is the mere presence of international students, foreign workers, and, or New Canadians at events indicative of mutuality and belonging? What have we done to bring them to a place of belonging? Have we listened to their stories? Have we understood how they understand and navigate the world? Have we invited them into family discussion and planning, using the wisdom and gifts they bring?

Immigrant-background children are a growing segment of Canada's population. The most recent numbers we have in Canada on immigrant children comes from the 2016 census. It reports 37.5 per cent of the under-fifteen population are first-generation immigrants or have at least one parent who is foreign-born.<sup>13</sup> Further, Census projections suggest by 2036, between 39.3% and 49.1% of the entire population of children aged 15 and under living in Canada will be foreign-born or have at least one first-generation parent.<sup>14</sup>

[Following excerpts from Lorajoy Tira-Dimangundayao in Charles A. Cook, Lauren Goldbeck, & Lorajoy Tira-Dimangundayao eds. "Chapter eleven: From Hospice to Home" in *Beyond Hospitality: Migration, Multiculturalism, and the Church*. (Toronto: Tyndale Academic Press. 2020.) 121-131.]

I share my own migrant story with you to illustrate the identity-forming process for an immigrant-background child in a diverse society. While my journey is uniquely mine, its complexity reflects those of millions of people who are resettling in new places. We are all in search of belonging and home. This is a journey and desire both physical and spiritual, on which, I believe, immigrant-background children, specifically the foreign-born who have embraced "family values," have the potential of playing an integral role in bringing people, particularly migrants, from hospice to "home."

I will briefly address the elephant in the room, because it is a real challenge in the diaspora community and should not be avoided, [but corrected]. "Christianity is a

<sup>11</sup> "Canada's population estimates, first quarter 2019," The Daily, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/190619/dq190619c-eng.html>. The Covid-19 pandemic restrictions greatly reduced immigrations numbers (see "Canada's population estimates, fourth quarter 2020" at <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/en/daily-quotidien/210318/dq210318c-eng.pdf?st=GBVYuHEV>). The federal government has announced plans to drastically increase immigration numbers to revive the Canadian economy post-Covid-19. (See "Government of Canada announces plan to support economic recovery through immigration" at <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/news/2020/10/government-of-canada-announces-plan-to-support-economic-recovery-through-immigration.html>).

<sup>12</sup> In Canada, the first country in the world to introduce a points-based immigration system, and formalise and implement an official multiculturalism policy, are communities moving beyond government-prescribed hospitality to genuine connection in the Canadian family?

<sup>13</sup> "Census in Brief: Children with an immigrant background: Bridging cultures." *Statistics Canada*, October 25, 2017, accessed October 1, 2021, <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/as-sa/98-200-x/2016015/98-200-x2016015-eng.cfm>.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

white religion, Mom.” My son was eleven and he was eager to report his new knowledge. He was reading about the early European explorers, settlers, and missionaries in his social studies course. My first thought was to protest loudly, but a few moments of thought and prayer allowed me to recognise his context. First, there was his Alberta social studies curriculum. To address the Canadian colonial past, students are encouraged to examine effects of European settlement. Second, there was the inescapable truth that my child was born into and was being raised and educated in a proudly diverse and pluralistic society. Every day, he interacted with people from around the world who held different beliefs - one being that Canada was a “Christian” country, and two, that Canada was “white.”

It is tragic that many people conflate Christianity, colonialism, nationality, and race, [thus] it is a concern that must be addressed. As the dominance of western Christendom wanes, Christians are called upon to answer for power differentials found in history. Furthermore, representations of Jesus as framed by dominant western traditions are also being challenged.

As a person of immigrant background, I find it interesting how new Canadians from non-Christian backgrounds tend to conflate the four, while our public institutions boast our cultural, racial, and religious diversity. The Church must actively educate congregants on wider church history, balanced local history, and the global church. Moreover, in the demise of western Christendom, Christians must rediscover and emulate kingdom values as sought by the first century church.

Along this line, Canadian congregations must recognise that, according to current immigration trends and forecasts, most immigrants to Canada are coming from countries that have recent colonial histories. This can be more complex than meets the eye. For example, when local congregations minister to Filipinos, they are best advised to study modern Filipino traits as an outcome of Spanish and American influences, and of continuing subjugation evidenced in the global economy. These cultures and their occupations of the Philippines have shaped the Filipino’s sense of self, of community, and of God. A foreign-born, Canadian-raised person may very well be the child of not just the French and English empires, but also of the Spanish, of the American, and maybe even of the globalised economy all rolled into one. This same Filipino, in the impressionable years of adolescence, may, if alienated and not supported [in family], form reactive allegiances in response to perceived prejudice and discrimination.<sup>15</sup>

Especially at a time when racial division and historical injustice seem to be coming to the forefront, it is imperative that denominations, our denomination, reject images of superiority and subjugation—the slaver’s ship, the Empire’s galleon, the colonialist’s vessel, the Imperial’s warship, the trader’s ship of consumerism. We must, in a countercultural move replace these images! Instead, our Alliance family must seek to embody the *family and the home*, where people are loved into being, where they are given a platform from which to add

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<sup>15</sup>Lorajoy Tira-Dimangundayao in Charles A. Cook, Lauren Goldbeck, & Lorajoy Tira-Dimangundayao eds. “Chapter eleven: From Hospice to Home” in *Beyond Hospitality: Migration, Multiculturalism, and the Church*. (Toronto: Tyndale Academic Press. 2020.) 121-131.

their voice to our song. We must perpetuate the image of a home where gifts are drawn out and put to the service of the family enterprise—for the flourishing of our communities and the world.

I suggest to you, that a vision of family provides both the centripetal and centrifugal forces to reinforce our identity and send us out—it holds us in and pushes us out.

Along this line, If we believe that Jesus is the Christ—the Healer for everyone everywhere, local congregations must represent this in tangible ways. Foreign-born children, particularly visible minority children, need to see co-ethnics represented in church leadership and actively participating in church life. This would necessitate greater involvement of immigrant background adults. The truth of the home and family must supersede the reality of the earthly—scarred by subjugation and alienation.

[Following excerpts from Lorajoy Tira-Dimangondayao in Charles A. Cook, Lauren Goldbeck, & Lorajoy Tira-Dimangondayao eds. “Chapter eleven: From Hospice to Home” in *Beyond Hospitality: Migration, Multiculturalism, and the Church*. (Toronto: Tyndale Academic Press. 2020.) 121-131.]

In retrospect, my childhood cultural confusion was curtailed by the strength of my parents’ Christian conviction. When faced with a perceived cultural discrepancy, I would turn to my parents for an explanation of the contrasting values I witnessed. “Daddy, why do we not do *this* the way other Filipinos (or Canadians) do?” To which my father would respond, “We must be guided by *the Jesus way*.” I may have been confused, but my parents were not, and their preference for Jesus-modelled culture over our culture of national origin or adopted Canadian culture provided me with a framework for working through future cultural conflicts.

No earthly culture is perfect; all cultures have values and norms that need redemption. When fielding cultural concerns, I remember how my parents provided stability for me by pointing to the Jesus way. While they taught me to be sensitive to a spectrum of cultural expectations, for them, desirable behaviour boiled down to following the Jesus way. This Jesus way prioritised working together in the spirit of humility and peace, over establishing a “right way” solely based on cultural expectations.

Census 2016 reports, “the majority of children [with an immigrant background] under the age of 15 (74.0%) were from an Asian country [including the Middle East] of ancestry, an American country of ancestry (excluding the United States) or an African country of ancestry.” This contrasts with previous migration trends, with “almost half (46.1%) of the population between the ages of 35 and 64 and almost 70% of the population aged 65 and older [originating] from a European country of ancestry and the United States.” With continued migration, it comes as no surprise that cultures will collide.

In *Legacies: the Story of the Immigrant Second Generation*, Alejandro Portes and Rubén G. Rumbaut study second-generation youths (of immigrant background). One proposed contextual factor for adaption is “the host society and its reception of newcomers.” They echo the “well-established sociological principle... that the more similar new minorities are in terms of physical appearance, class background, language, and religion to society’s mainstream, the more favorable their reception and the more rapid their integration.”

I propose that Christian unity, manifested in a shared “family-Christ-centred-culture,” transcends cultural differences, and a healthy church family can adequately assist foreign-born children and their families in adjusting to local life. Local churches can uphold Jesus culture over what is perceived to be local culture. Likewise, instead of aligning with ethnocentric norms dictated by the culture of origin, parents may be disciplined to guide their children in the ways of Jesus.

Special attention must also be given to teaching parents about kingdom goals and investments versus the preoccupying pursuit of the “immigrant dream” that is frequently driven by material aspirations.

Further, instruction in Christ’s family culture, from a young age instills an appreciation for family values that will hopefully, in the fullness of time, guide the foreign-born to taking their place in bridge-building between cultures and communities.

My parents, always hoping to return to their home country, did not apply for Canadian citizenship until I was a teenager. So, after a childhood of singing allegiance to the Queen, I become a citizen of Canada when I was 15. I started voting when I was 18. The diaspora child is on the road to naturalisation and fullness of citizenship; however, legal citizenship, in and of itself, is not enough. Internalisation of the new country’s values, full participation in national life, and the externalization of national identity is the goal.

Likewise, full partnership in the faith community is the goal. Naturally equipped with knowledge of both the culture of national origin and the culture of the new country, diaspora children may be mentored in the ways of Jesus’ family for partnership in God’s home-making in the world. The intentional discipleship of whole immigrant families in the context of genuine relationship is essential. Beyond providing immigrant integration services such as Adopted Language classes, community kitchens, clothing drives, and income tax assistance, churches must provide foreign-born congregants with equal avenues for service, as responsibilities demonstrate trust and acceptance and cultivate a sense of investment and belonging in the family enterprise.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.



To reiterate, Census Canada predicts by 2036, “between 39.3% and 49.1% of the entire population of children aged 15 and under [living in Canada] will be foreign-born or have one first-generation parent.”

In the interest of our missionary denomination, local congregations must prioritise the discipleship of families, particularly the children of immigrant backgrounds, for ongoing partnership with God in the family business of making human homes in which God desires to dwell.

Foreign-born children have the potential of being valuable partners in the family business and they should be motivated, equipped, and mobilised. The journey to belonging may start long before responsibility is fully realised, but when the foreign-born are accepted, mentored, and trusted with family goals and responsibilities, they move past the welcome mat to a permanent seat at the family table. When congregations move “outsiders” and “visitors” from the foyer to the kitchen, less lines will be drawn based on responses to “where are you from?,” instead, allegiances will be formed by the answers to the question, “where are you serving?”<sup>17</sup>

The point of what we do is not the modern sense of forwarding superiority and success based on ever-growing numbers. The point of what we do is to invite others into family and into the family business of home-making, to show them—through our lives—that God is making a life in us, with us. That God wants to make his home with us!! This idea of home, changes the way we look at things. It goes far beyond the urgency of a “hospice” in which people are prepared for death. We must go beyond the limited image of collecting people in a hospice and giving out “basic instructions before leaving earth.” In contrast, Home is the imagery of Eternal life. This reality transforms communities. It transforms the world.

Revelation 21:3 in the NRSV says:

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,  
 “See, the home[a] of God is among mortals.  
 He will dwell[b] with them;  
 they will be his peoples,[c]  
 and God himself will be with them;

The New Century Version reads:

And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, “Now God’s presence is with people, and he will live with them, and they will be his people. God himself will be with them and will be their God.

The New Life Version reads:

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

I heard a loud voice coming from heaven. It said, “See! God’s home is with men. He will live with them. They will be His people. God Himself will be with them. He will be their God.

The point of all we do, to answer my initial questions, is this: Christ in us—at home in us— is the hope of Glory. That *is* good news, the Gospel, for a homeless world.

There is a metaphor of the indwelling of God. It looks like metal held to the high temperatures of fire. In the fire, the metal is transformed, and glows with the flame. So long as it stays one with the fire, the metal appears like the fire!<sup>18</sup> The point is: God Himself. He, at home in us, so that we and others may exclaim, as our Rev. Verduyn described in our time together this morning<sup>19</sup>: “I see in you the face of God!”

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<sup>18</sup> Miroslav Volf, TH5/734: The Home of God (class lecture, *Vancouver School of Theology*, Vancouver, BC, July 9, 2021).

<sup>19</sup>See Arie Verduyn, “Deeper Life and the Missional Mind,” *AWF Quadrennial Convocation 2021*, Morning October 21, 2021 (Guayaquil, Ecuador, October 21, 2021, video, 57:46-1:01:16, <https://youtu.be/0AcdBQogOyE>).