

frUits IN OuR THOUgHts

Complexity and diversity are the characteristic of life. Everywhere we go, anywhere we live, we encounter with those who are different from us. There are differences in language, culture, ethnicity, physical appearance, belief system and worldview. These differences can make life seemingly complex and chaotic.

Living in Australia reflects these characteristics, especially in metropolitan and town. But it does not mean that rural and outback is exempt from these characteristics. Because for many thousand years, the first people: the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are very diverse communities. There are many languages and cultures among the first people.

While most of our society has moved with these diversities, sadly our church community are still far away from these characteristics.

There are many ways we could explain our communities, but in this paper I am going to share a bunch of fruits to illustrate the ways of our communities thinking about it's own identity. (Suggestion: read this paper along side with a paper on "paradigm / models of community")

1. Mango Community (one in one)

Most of us love mango, it's sweet, easy to recognise and attractive. We immediately knew what is inside it from the outside. Mango has only one seed with very tasty meat covering by soft skin. Mango community is a community with one system of organisation within one particular culture or tradition and communicate with one common language. We would recognise this community as a racial / ethnic community. For examples: Korean Community, Vietnamese Community, Tongan Community, Sudanese Community, Tamil Community, Dutch Community, Greek Community, and so on. The primary purpose of this community is preserve it's own identity within wider community. This community is trying hard to be seen as close as a community in back home country. Because of this purpose, the relationship with wider community is 'you' and 'we' relationship. It is

clear separation or limited relationship with others. We would find many stories about Mango Community within the Old Testament. When Abraham and Sarah migrated from their homeland and lived in Palestine, they and their extended family believed that God has called them to live according to their ancestor's belief. They survived sustained their own identity by worshiping their own God who is different from other gods in wider community. They lived within their own culture and tradition. Abraham and Sarah decided to find their daughter in law from their own clan. They asked their servant to find a girl from their home country. Within the UCA we would find Mango Community. A number of people migrated to Australia, believed that God has lead them in a new country. They form a specific ethnic, racial and language community to survive in a context. This Mango community becomes 'a safe place' for it's members to express their feelings, dreams and struggles. They speak with their homeland language, they dance with their own music, and they worship with their own familiar liturgy. This Mango Community becomes a source of their strength, a place where they belong. There are also many English Speaking Congregations can be categorised as Mango Community. It's important for this Mango Community not to fall into self-centre racism that is looking at own particular ethnicity, culture and tradition is better than others. Feeling superiority is the root of sin and destruction.

2. Corn Community (many in one)

We all know that there are many seed in one corn. Corn Community is a community who host many other communities in it's own system. Corn community happens when a particular community offering it's own hospitality to many different groups. For the host community, this reflects a limited inclusive approach. The host open their place to be used by others but still holding the authority / power. The host practices the understanding of 'being a blessing' for other groups. It is a good start because has its intention to embrace other to be part of their own life. But the place always belongs to the host. For the other groups, they would feel gratitude for this hospitality and offer a limited

participation in host's mission. The other groups still focus on their own identity, to preserve their language, culture and belief. We may call this Corn Community as a multicultural congregation. Within the UCA, we could find one (usually) Anglo Celtic Congregation is offering their hospitality to different ethnic groups (Indonesian, Fijian, Arabic, Chinese and so on) as long as it does not intervene their activities. Other ethnic groups could worship at their church after they finishing their morning tea; others could use their hall as long as not reducing their property income. But increasingly in the past few years more non Anglo Celtic Congregations became the host of the places and offering limited hospitality to others. It would be interesting relationship if Anglo Celtic Group were the recipient of this hospitality. It is important to Corn Community to reflect deeply what does the relationship between host and guest really mean? Because in many cases the guest actually gave blessings the host. The guest becomes the host in a very creative ways. In Genesis 18, Abraham welcomes three guests (strangers) into his tent. He gave them a meal fellowship as part of Abraham's hospitality and inclusive approach to others. But at the end of this relationship, it is actually the three strangers (guests) became the host because they gave blessings to Abraham. There is also similar theme in the Gospel stories, particularly very clear in Luke (24 13-35) when two of disciples offering their hospitality to 'a stranger the Risen Christ' – at their home, this guest is actually took their place as the host and offering to bless them.

3. Passion or Mandarin Community (one in many)

Passion (Mandarin) fruit is one fruit with many parts / seeds inside it. Passion Community is a community with many different cultures, traditions, language, racial and ethnicity. These different groups share in one system, mission and ministry. Passion Community reflects its own understanding about equality and unique participation from each group for building the whole community. We may call this Passion Community as a cross-cultural congregation. A congregation with many cultures, traditions and ways of thinking's but share together in

their worship, pastoral care and mission. Each member (group) is able to contribute his/her (their) gifts and talents and opens to be changed by the relationship with others who are part of this community. There is no one feel better than others. Passion Community is bound by Jesus as the true vine (John 15). Each member as a branch of this true vine would give fruits in time. Each member exists for others. Paul in his letter to Corinthians (12-14) talks about the gifts of Holy Spirit in building the body of Christ. Each gift is corresponding with other gifts. In Passion Community there is no gift would able to flourish except in relationship with others. Each member is willing to learn / experience the (new) ways of the Holy Spirit is leading the community. They may learn new language, culture and tradition in order to fulfil their calling. Passion Community is not assimilation community, nor tolerant community. Assimilation is denying its own identity in order to please others. And tolerant is ignoring other identity in order to please its own identity. Fundamentally both assimilation and tolerant do not reflect a genuine, open and honest relationship between its members.

4. Pineapple or Durian Community (many in many)

Pineapple and Durian are unique fruits. Pineapple has many different part / square line on the skin. When we open it, there are many dots (eyes) inside it. Durian has a similar physical structure like pineapple. Durian has many sharp dots on the skin. When we open it, there are many part of inside; each part has between one to three fruits / seeds. It is not easy to open both pineapple and durian. For those who do not like durian, actually do not like the smell. One-way to reduce the smell after eating durian is using the inside skin for drinking. Pineapple or Durian Community is a community with many mix racial, cultural, traditional and belief systems. Each member bring its own unique personality, background and experience to build relationship with those are also unique and different. Pineapple or Durian Community is best understood as a second / next generation migrant people. As a son or daughter from migrant people, the Next Gen grew up in mix society. Some may grew in a particular cultural and traditional ways of living at

home and have many friends at school, social life, work place and wider community who are different from their own. The Next Gen lives naturally with different value systems from their parents. At best this Pineapple (Durian) Community is able to hold in tension these paradox in their life; at worse this community could lose their unique identities and struggles to accept their own identity. One very fundamental to this community is accepting that life is chaos. In the very beginning in Creation Story, God created chaos; the earth was formless, void and darkness (after the creation) and the Spirit of God flew over the chaos. As part of God's creation, chaos is good as good as other creations – chaos as good as light. And importantly God's own Spirit works over / in / through chaos. While for the other three communities (Mango, Corn and Passion) orderly life is very important, for this Pineapple or Durian Community, chaos is the characteristic of their orderly life. It is a lively disorder. The relationship within Next Gen Community is very personal and fluid as the Holy Spirit is also very personal. The wind of God blew disorderly – different from time to time and boundless by place but there is a significant change in each place when the Spirit of God came. To relate with the Next Gen is to experience together with them in their lively disorder life. It is chaotic because it requires total trust and obedience in God's Spirit.

5. Pawpaw Community (Triune Community – one and many coexist together)

Pawpaw is a healing tree. People use the leaf for healing high blood pressure and its fruit for tummy upset. When we open pawpaw fruit, there are three important aspects: seed, space and air. The seed of life symbolises the Creator (God), the space symbolises the place of Cross (Christ) and air symbolises the Holy Spirit. God gives life to every creature. God works in every aspect of life. The space is where the Word became a human in Jesus Christ. The place deals with people in a particular time and space. It relates to culture, language, tradition and system. As the incarnation Word of God, Jesus was bound by a particularity of his earthly family. He grew within a specific

cultural background (Jewish culture), spoke with a specific language (Aramic) and performed a traditional ceremony (went to the Temple in a certain days and years). The Holy Spirit as a wind does not bound by any space but works within the space and life of God. The three of aspects within Pawpaw Community reflect the understanding of Triune God within any healing community. It is interdependency relationship between its members in community. Each culture, tradition and belief system has its own space but coexist with others to give new life. It is also open to the Spirit of God to transform its members. Renewal and reconnected with others are the characteristic Pawpaw Community. Pawpaw Community is a community that enable the other communities (Mango, Corn, Passion and Durian) coexist together. Pawpaw Community is a healing community: where there is a division, it offers unity; where there is a discrimination and racism, it offers togetherness as a unique community where each ethnicity offers its own gifts to others; where there is a separation between generation, it offers a wisdom of chaos in a safe space where each generation is able to be part of the Spirit transformation and renewal.

These five different fruits reflect the reality of our community within the UCA. Each fruit community has its own history and future. I don't think it is a good idea to compare each community to other. Offcourse each community in its own journey may move from one fruit community to another fruit. This movement is not to be seen as that the presence fruit is better than the previous one. In other situations, one fruit community may not change to other fruit.

The purpose of this paper is to encourage each community to reflect its own identity, mission and the relationship with one another.

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