

Reaching Diverse Ethnic Groups in New York

by **PETER K. JOHNSON** on 15 May 2015



The world meets in New York City, home to 82 people groups. That awareness has fired up Paul Kraus, Assemblies of God U.S. missionary, to lead the New York AG District's own stand-alone Intercultural Ministries (IM) Department with substantive plans.

As a former AG world missionary serving primarily in Côte d'Ivoire, Kraus understands the challenges to evangelize the global community. "We must prepare for the world coming to our doorstep," Kraus says. "We cannot serve people until we really know them."

The local ethnic picture highlights the need. For example, two million Jews, 800,000 Muslims, and 400,000 Hindus live in metropolitan New York. Students speak almost 170 languages in the Big Apple's public schools. About half the residents of the borough of Queens are foreign born and speak a language other than English when returning home from work or school.

Kraus views New York as a salad bowl of multicultural diversity rather than the traditional melting pot of Europeans from a Christian background. The majority of immigrants in the past decade have come from Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Reaching them is vital.

To this end, Kraus is organizing partnerships with ethnic and traditional churches, and sponsoring seminars to help understand the specialized needs of the foreign born and framing tactics for reaching them. For example, Muslims and Hindus usually are uncomfortable entering a traditional church building, so strategies must be devised to remove this cultural barrier. Language can be a hindrance as well, along with misunderstanding Christianese lingo. But offering English as a second language classes could be a useful solution.

Professionals working in Manhattan from countries closed to Christianity offer a rare opportunity for evangelism. Kraus believes such recent arrivals are more open to the gospel in a different and unrestricted cultural setting.

In February, the New York AG IM Department held a seminar in conjunction with Westchester Christian Worship Center in White Plains, New York, and AG Japanese leaders Daisuke and Yoriko Yabuki of Central Assembly of God in Springfield, Missouri. At the conference, designed to develop a strategy to reach the 50,000 Japanese living in New York City, three attendees accepted Christ as Savior. Another event focusing on reaching Jews and Muslims is scheduled for September.

In addition, the department will launch a five-course intercultural ministry study-tract next year, with the New York District's School of Missions, training intercultural workers for local church-based ministry. The vision of the IM Department is a 10-year project.

Scott Temple, director of the Assemblies of God Office of Ethnic Relations in Springfield, Missouri, views all the districts IM activities in a positive light.

"The need is real and overwhelming," Temple says. "What could the local church accomplish for the Kingdom if we had eyes to see and the compassion to reach the ever-changing world outside our door?"

"At the end we want to create a movement doing cross-cultural outreach throughout the entire New York metropolitan region promoting a missional philosophy," Kraus stresses.

Paul Kraus

AG Intercultural Ministries

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