

## Crossing Boundaries

The beauty of the Neuse River basin touches 1.5 million North Carolinians<sup>1</sup> and begins as a fast, fresh waterway above Durham. As it reaches New Bern, it widens, slows down, becomes brackish, and travels another forty miles to empty into the Pamlico-Albemarle Sound, the most valued fish estuary in the nation.

Rivers flow as they are supposed to, sometimes bursting their banks or altering their course. And they are unimpeded by man-made contrivances wearing through the dam or berm put there to contain them.

The river has a mission to move on, to flow and it makes no distinction of the people it serves. Laura Everett, writes “To fully preach the gospel, we need to sit with people wildly different from us.”<sup>2</sup> Everett wants us to be like the river. Rather than stay in our comfort zone, we must initiate opportunities to roll on and become estuaries for God. In this different place, we discover new life, meaning, and understanding in God’s word. We can find it as Everett suggests, by seeking others with diverse economic, social, and cultural experiences from our own. Preparation for my ministry started early.

At 6, I tightly held my mother’s hand as I walked into a school where no one looked like me. New to the suburbs, I had the nervousness of any first grader, but soon learned these children were like me in many ways. And they learned I was not so strange either.

This is the heart of my ministry, helping churches and church leadership embrace diversity and inclusion. Solutions to oneness in Christ begins first by understanding cultural boundaries are man-made creations. While preserving our traditions, they also limit our oneness in Christ. Just like the dams on a river, they slow the flow.

Imagine: genetically, we are all 99 percent the same.<sup>3</sup> Our differences are estimated to be less than 1 percent. Should these create boundaries which continue to separate the body of Christ in churches across the nation?

In reality, the division is not in our genes, but in the systems we embrace within our individual cultures: family traditions, social expectations, and even worship and preaching styles are all examples of cultural divides to explore.

Expanding our experiences in other cultures increases our knowledge like water flowing over river banks, intentionally creating new streams of understanding.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.riverlaw.us/theneuse.html>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.faithandleadership.com/laura-everett-fully-preach-gospel-we-need-sit-people-wildly-different-us>

<sup>3</sup> [http://genetics.thetech.org/original\\_news/news38](http://genetics.thetech.org/original_news/news38)

Crossing boundaries like a river is how God uniquely designed my purpose and ministry. He is providing me opportunities to serve people in many cultures, including last year as an interim pastor in Westray, Scotland.

After graduating seminary this past spring, God provided an opportunity to serve a church where the language, culture and worship were different from any in my past. The experience brought me closer to this confirmation. God's hand has been holding mine through it all.

Feeling like a stuttering Moses going before the Israelites, I questioned how God would resolve the boundaries that existed between me and this church community. My questions were answered, I flowed into the Spirit and we share God's love.

In 2002, the Burmese Christian Fellowship, renamed the Chin Christian Fellowship in 2004 was planted by Burmese refugees who struggled and risked everything to begin life new in America. Six years later, First Baptist Church of New Bern partnered in their faith walk by providing meeting space, pastor ordination, tutoring, school supplies and English as a Second Language (ESL) classes for this faithful home-grown congregation, now identified as First Chin Baptist Church of New Bern.

Reverend Vanbawi Ven's willingness to honor Christ and embrace me as Pastor of Community Outreach, speaks to the readiness of this leader and a congregation in understanding inclusion is about change. This partnership deepens their acceptance of the American culture.

The language constraints are awkward, but I am intentionally learning, teaching, and expressing a love of God through a new culture. Each week my Hakha Chin vocabulary and cultural understanding is growing, and the obstacles I questioned are calmed by a loving congregation.

The body of Christ is diverse and crossing cultural boundaries is an intentional ministry to be pursued with our hearts. Purposely face outwards, engage and develop opportunities for outreach, understand the value systems of others and fulfill the Great Commission. Jesus crossed many boundaries and lived a life where everyone mattered. In the same love, Christians are called to become like rivers and flow into God's estuary of diversity and inclusion.

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