

Decolonizing Evangelism

The essential work that precedes our mission.

An interview with CBOQ's Rev. Cid Latty



What does “decolonizing evangelism” mean?

Let’s talk about “decolonizing” first. We must recognize that history plays a part in our seeking to do evangelism.

History gives us context.

Yes. History is like skimming pebbles across a pond – we see the ripples long after the pebbles have disappeared. Canada is, still, a colony. Colonization produced ripples – and those ripples have affected us. Colonization is not apparent, but it is still there.

Is colonization negative?

Colonization produced beliefs, behaviours and ways of thinking that were reinforced by the way colonial countries educated their colonies. Education reinforced the ways of

thinking, behaviours and beliefs that the colonizers wanted their colonies to have. So today, in Canada, we have structures, principles and form – all of these intentionally put there by colonizers.

Some of the things colonizers did were good – they were seeking to be humanitarian. Others were not and we see this in the history of Indigenous Peoples in this country.

What is the link between colonization and evangelism?

Colonialism produced a system that prefers one ethnicity above others. Therefore, when it comes to evangelism, we must ask: Are the ways that we think, believe and behave coming more from the culture of our colonizers or from

the culture of Heaven? We need to remove the shroud that covers our behaviours, beliefs and ways of thinking, and prevents us from reflecting the culture of the kingdom of God.

What will it mean for our churches to engage in decolonizing evangelism?

It will mean several things. May I list them?

Go ahead!

Decolonizing evangelism means uncovering our preferences and biases because these cause us to see and respond to some things and not to others. I’ve spoken with church leaders who say there are no families in the church’s extended

neighbourhood and yet there's a huge public school two minutes down from the church. Others have insisted that their church area is homogenous and homelessness doesn't exist when in fact different ethnicities *do* live in the church's area and people *are* homeless. This is the ripple effect of colonialism.

What do you mean?

When it comes to evangelism, colonialism has taught us to say, "These people are significant and these people are not." We will not see what's around us because of the way we've been educated.



So one aspect of decolonizing evangelism means we recognize our assumptions.

Yes. It means we admit that we speak and think in certain ways that hinder evangelism. For example, there may be an underlying tone in our communication and a posture that prefers white men. All these things hinder our approach to evangelism.

Tell us more.

One of the ripple effects of colonialism presents itself in our belief that we needed to prefer the educated, the wealthy and those in power. (Historically these have been white men.) The assumption here is that there are multiple races and that some races are to be valued over others.

Decolonizing evangelism means we'll need to re-define race, and in fact, recognize that we are surrounded

by multiple *ethnicities* and multiple *cultures*, not multiple races. In Revelation 5, John reminds us that persons from every tribe, language and nation who believe, become part of God's kingdom; priests who serve God. We are equal and we are one before God.

We are born with our ethnicities. We've inherited them from our parents and we cannot change them. On the other hand, culture is made up of the stories we tell that shape us; that form and reinforce our sense of who we are as a collective in the world. And in every culture there are things that reflect God's image and things that do not.

And so, as we decolonize evangelism, we will begin to see and celebrate things we haven't before. We will welcome people we don't normally welcome. We will celebrate the stories from different cultures that reflect the image of God.

Cultures are important.

That's right. Decolonizing evangelism means we recognize that how people speak, dress and eat will impact the process of evangelism.

For example, food says: *I like your culture because I am eating the food you eat.* Through food, we can change the tone of our evangelism. Could we, in our respective churches, reveal some of who Jesus is, and who we are, in how we host church meals? Jesus was so generous. Could we use food and show God's generosity? At the Lamb's marriage supper, everyone is welcome. Could we use food to restore relationships and community in our church neighbourhoods?

Some of us have much to unlearn! Where do we start?

First – go talk to some strangers. Second – as we read in John 1, God sent His Son. He didn't send an edict, a decree or put on an event. He sent a person. So evangelism is relationship, not a series of events. Third – let's not count events. Count conversations instead: *How many conversations can we have with our communities?* Fourth – we ask God to help us notice things; to notice what's around us. We need to pray Elisha's prayer so we can see (2 Kings 6). Let us do prayer walks and ask the Lord: *Help us to see what you see.* Fifth – we must learn to listen, and to listen with intent, where we understand what's being said and we reflect back what we've heard. Why? Because our communities are trying to tell us something about how they want to engage and be. Are we listening to understand? 🗨️

Rev Cid Latty is CBOQ's congregational development associate where his current focus is church planting and church revitalization.

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