

Worship around the world

This article was contributed to the Key by Nadia Taylor who visited BPC for a few Sundays in May this year. In conversation over coffee Nadia talked about the very different experiences of Christian worship she had around the world. Here is her account of some of them:

How lucky we are. Even though churches around us are closing or being converted into apartments, etc we still have a choice and freedom to practise our faith without restriction. What makes me say that? I have lived abroad in a total of eight different places around the world, most of them being in Muslim countries and have not always had the freedom or choice that we sometimes take for granted.

Before we left England we attended an Anglican church in Mill Hill. On hearing that our first posting was to be in Sarawak, East Malaysia on the island of Borneo and famous for its head hunting, in an effort to give us extra protection our church rushed us through confirmation classes and sent us on our way. Our young curate even found a church called St James for us to attend. The only problem being that it was actually in Brunei – very close on the map, but with immigration, not easily accomplished early on a Sunday morning. (Remember the name of this church for future reference).

However, this wasn't needed as Sarawak is a Christian state in East Malaysia due to the influence of the English Rajah Brookes and the missionaries who followed. There was a church for us to attend - the only problem being that we could only attend once every three weeks as the services were in a different language each week - Chinese, one week, Iban - the language of the head hunting tribe another week and English on the third week. When we did attend we found that the church was packed - the congregation came every week whether or not the service was in their language!

Later that year we moved to a small oil town in Venezuela 2 hours flight south of Caracas where we were the only English family. As the service was in Spanish and the church Catholic we were unable to attend. But God is faithful. It was just me and Him and he was or should I say is, always there.

Our next stop in Karachi brought me into contact with missionaries. Most were there officially as legitimate business concerns but their real mission was to evangelise and to translate the Bible into Urdu for converts. Our church was a house with easily movable furniture so that the transition from house to church could be easily effected each Sunday morning. Once most of the congregation were in attendance the front doors were locked - latecomers knew they could enter by a side door. We were allowed to worship but being Karachi (ever noticed how trouble in Pakistan usually occurs in Karachi?) we were also easy targets for the more anti - Western Muslim fundamentalists. During my time there anti -Western feelings were so high that eventually the Americans were evacuated and our church house which had been inhabited by our American pastor was closed down.

The missionaries then organised it so that we would meet to worship together in a different house each week, and so we waited for a telephone call every Saturday night to find out where to meet the following Sunday morning. Slowly the church shrank as more and more people left until there were only the missionaries, although in time they left too.

We had a too short posting in Perth, Western Australia where we visited a huge church with a congregation of several thousand – it was like attending a convention rather than a church.