



# BEYOND *the* WELCOME:

Churches Responding to  
the Immigrant Reality in Canada

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## FINAL RESEARCH REPORT

October, 2010



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## 1. INTRODUCTION

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This research study was carried out collaboratively by World Vision (WV), The Tyndale Intercultural Ministries Centre (TIM Centre), and the Centre for Community Based Research (CCBR). At the heart of this study is a shared vision of Canadian churches where recent immigrants are fully welcomed and included.

This report highlights the findings of a national study involving over 300 interdenominational church leaders in cities

across Canada. We learned that there is a trend toward welcoming and integrating recent immigrants among churches in Canadian cities. However we also learned that Canadian churches need to move beyond the initial, often shallow, welcome. Specifically, churches need to better respond to recent immigrants by promoting a vision, creating structures and developing processes that enable churches to more effectively welcome and integrate recent immigrants into church life.

### 1.1 STUDY PARTNERS

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#### WORLD VISION

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World Vision was the lead organization for this project and the project funder. World Vision is Canada's largest private relief and development agency. In 2007, Canadians sponsored 454,309 children around the world through World Vision. Child sponsorship helps fund World Vision Canada's international long-term development projects. World Vision Canada has a long history of partnering with the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and other government bodies in overseas development and in addressing global issues, such as child rights, hunger, and health.

World Vision Canada opened its Toronto office in 1957. Today the new national headquarters is one of World Vision's busiest offices. The Canadian Programs division hopes to inspire positive changes throughout Canada by partnering with churches, educational institutions and other non-profit organizations.

In 1979 World Vision Canada launched its first domestic programs in response to those arriving at our shores as the "Vietnamese Boat People." This led World Vision to become the second organization sanctioned by the Canadian government to help Canadians to sponsor refugees to find a

new home in Canada. Since that time World Vision has supported the creation of the Christie Refugee Welcome Centre. As of 2005, through its Partners to End Child Poverty Program, World Vision has worked with over 70 organizations in Canada who are working to end child poverty in the lives of new immigrants, aboriginal and single parent families.

#### TIM CENTRE

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Tyndale Intercultural Ministry Centre (TIM Centre) was the lead partner in Toronto and Hamilton. The TIM Centre is part of Tyndale University College and Seminary located in Toronto. The Centre's mission is "to act as a catalyst to mobilize the Christian faith community toward a more intentional and effective engagement in local and global missions". The TIM Centre is strategically located in what has been described as the world's most multicultural city, drawing on the many thriving multiethnic communities.

TIM Centre has the advantage of linking with a vast network of local churches, denominations and mission organizations, partnering with church and para-church organizations to carry out its mandate. One such partnership is the UReachToronto project which is now part of TIM Centre's "Diaspora Initiative". The goal of this web

portal ([www.ureachtoronto.com](http://www.ureachtoronto.com)) is to become a resource centre for Christians engaged in Intercultural ministry. UReachToronto assists Christians to connect with one another and discover the many resources available to help develop a strategic vision and skills to reach our multicultural community.

### THE CENTRE FOR COMMUNITY BASED RESEARCH (CCBR)

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CCBR (formerly Centre for Research and Education in Human Services) was contracted to manage the research team. CCBR is an independent, not-for-profit organization established in 1982 ([www.communitybasedresearch.ca](http://www.communitybasedresearch.ca)). Located in Kitchener, Ontario, CCBR's mission is to use research to develop communities that are responsive and supportive, and to advance the equitable participation and integration of

all members of our community.

CCBR has conducted over 350 applied research projects at local, provincial, national and international levels. While CCBR conducts research on a broad spectrum within human services, a considerable amount of this research has been completed on issues related to cultural diversity. These projects include needs assessments, evaluation and policy research on such topics as: immigrant employment, immigrant parenting, immigrant youth, hate crimes and anti-racism, immigrant mental health, and civic participation. CCBR's participatory and action-oriented approach to research has helped CCBR develop trusting relationships with many cultural communities, immigrant service providers and immigration policy-makers.

## 1.2 STUDY PURPOSE AND MAIN RESEARCH QUESTIONS

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The purpose of this research project was twofold: 1) to explore how and to what extent Canadian churches are welcoming and integrating recent immigrants in their church-life, and 2) to determine the necessary strategies and structures that would better facilitate the active participation of recent immigrants within Canadian churches.

We used a number of methods to answer the following main research questions.

- 1. How do recent immigrants experience church in Canada?** To what extent and in what ways are they involved in Canadian churches? To what extent do they feel that their gifts are being used in church ministry? How does their experience of Canadian churches relate to their general settlement experience? How are they engaged in "mission" both to their own ethnic communities and in cross cultural settings? How do they understand issues of church (e.g., leadership, ministry, structure, inclusion, etc.)?
- 2. What has been the response of churches in Canada to recent immigrants?** What are their attitudes and perceptions towards recent immigrants? How much contact do they have with recent immigrants? What efforts have they made to welcome and include recent immigrants in the life of their church? To what degree are they aware of recent immigrant experiences and perspectives? How do their opinions about church (e.g., leadership, ministry, structure, inclusion) compare with recent immigrant perspectives?
- 3. Based on the answers above, what are the suggested strategies and structures that would best facilitate the active involvement of recent immigrants within Canadian churches?** What can churches do to be more welcoming and inclusive? What role can immigrant church leaders play? How can churches support each other? How can the interaction between established and recent immigrant church leaders be enhanced?

### 1.3 RESEARCH APPROACH

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In this project we used a participatory action research approach to answer the above research questions. Participatory action research can be defined as a “research approach that involves active participation of stakeholders, those whose lives are affected by the issue being studied, in all phases of research for the purpose of producing useful results to make positive changes” (Nelson, Ochocka, Lord, & Griffen, 1998, p.12).

We at CCBR regularly use a participatory and action-oriented approach when conducting research on immigrant-related topics (Janzen & Ochocka, 2008; Ochocka & Janzen, 2007). We try to meaningfully involve members of immigrant communities in the research process in such a way that is mutually beneficial. In this study we used the following concrete mechanisms to implement the participatory action research approach:

- We created a project advisory committee that included interdenominational immigrant and non-immigrant church leaders who provided guidance during all phases of the project (tools development, data gathering/analysis, report writing, knowledge mobilization).
- We included recent immigrants on the research team.
- We sampled research participants who held diverse stakeholder perspectives.
- We held community forums at three study sites to bring together all the research participants in order to verifying research findings and develop concrete action steps.

### 1.4 STUDY SCOPE AND SITES

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This study focuses on the response of Christian churches to the increasingly diverse immigrant reality in Canada. By response we mean how churches in Canada are *welcoming* recent immigrants (i.e., reaching out to them with initial hospitality and support), and then *integrating* them into church life so that they feel actively included and have a sense of belonging. Such a response can be done at multiple levels: within local church congregations, within Christian denominations, or in any variety of partnerships among churches, denominations, para-church organizations and community groups.

In this study we tried as much as possible to consider a diversity of church perspectives. We attempted to understand churches from across the spectrum of Christian denominations (including those not denominationally aligned), and from churches of all ages (including those well established and recently established). We also attempted to understand the perspectives of churches with any mix of Canadian-born and immigrant

membership (including ethno-specific immigrant congregations).

Regardless of the church structure, age or composition, our focus was on the response of churches to *recent immigrants*. We were not so concerned with specifically defining what “recent” meant (e.g., Statistics Canada defines recent as those arriving in the previous five years). But we wanted to make a distinction between recent newcomers and those who have been here for a longer period of time (regardless of their immigration class: economic, family, or refugee). In this way we wanted to recognize that all church leaders and church members (whether immigrant or Canadian-born) can play a role in responding to those most recently coming to our communities. Although also important, our study did not focus on the response of Canadian churches to Aboriginal people (i.e., First Nations, Inuit and Métis).

The study was national in scope. Some information was gathered that provided a general nation-wide picture. To give more in-



depth insights at the local level we also sought out qualitative information within five sites: Toronto, Vancouver, Montreal, Winnipeg, and Hamilton. These sites were selected because of their large immigrant populations. In addition, these sites represent five urban centres in which World Vision is presently active with its Canadian poverty-related efforts. The presence of World Vision staff and partners enabled us to be cost-effective in carrying out research activities within these sites.

## TORONTO

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Toronto is the largest urban centre in the country to receive immigrants. Every year, over 100,000 immigrants land in the Toronto area, nearly one half of the nation's total. The 2006 Census counted 2,320,200 foreign-born people in Toronto and the surrounding metropolitan areas (Toronto Census Metropolitan Area). This accounts for 38% of all immigrants in Canada. Between 2001 and 2006, the foreign-born population grew by 14%, compared to 5% for the Canadian-born population. In 2006 the foreign-born population accounted for 46% of the total population, up from 44% in 2001 (Statistics Canada, 2007). In 2006, 32% of the population identified themselves as Catholic, 22% Protestant, 4% Orthodox, and 4% other Christian denominations (Statistics Canada, 2010).

## VANCOUVER

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The 2006 Census counted 831,300 foreign-born people in the Vancouver Census Metropolitan Area, up about 92,700 from 2001. The population of foreign-born people increased five times than its Canadian-born population between 2001 and 2006. Foreign-born people accounted for 40% of the Vancouver Census Metropolitan Area's total population (Statistics Canada, 2007). In 2006, 19% percent of the population identified themselves as Catholic, 23% Protestant, 1% Orthodox, and 5% other Christian denominations (Statistics Canada, 2010).

## MONTREAL

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According to the 2006 Census, the Montreal Census Metropolitan Area had 740,000 foreign-born residents, accounting for 12% of the country's total foreign-born population. Between 2001 and 2006, Montreal's foreign-born population increased by 19%, nine times the growth rate of Montreal's Canadian-born population (2%). In 2006 the foreign-born population accounted for 21% of the total population, up from 44% in 2001 (Statistics Canada, 2007). In 2006, 71% of the population identified themselves as Catholic, 7% Protestant, 3% Orthodox, and 1% other Christian denominations (Statistics Canada, 2010).

## HAMILTON

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The Hamilton Census Metropolitan Area was home to 166,630 immigrants, of which 20,800 arrived in Canada between 2001 and 2006. The foreign-born population was 24% of the total population which ranked Hamilton as fifth among urban centres in Canada. Between 2001 and 2006, the foreign-born population increased by 8% while the total population grew by 4% (Statistics Canada, 2007). In 2006, 35% of the population identified themselves as Catholic, 35% Protestant, 3% Orthodox, and 3% other Christian denominations (Statistics Canada, 2010).

## WINNIPEG

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The foreign-born population in Winnipeg Census Metropolitan Area grew by 10% between 2001 and 2006. This outpaced the area's total growth which increased by 3% in the same period. As of 2006, the foreign-born population was 121,300 or 18% of the total population, up slightly from 17% in 2001 (Statistics Canada, 2007). In 2006, 32% of the population identified themselves as Catholic, 34% as Protestant, 2% as Orthodox, and 4% other Christian denominations (Statistics Canada, 2010).

## 1.5 RESEARCH METHODS AND ANALYSIS

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In this exploratory research we combined both quantitative and qualitative information as a way of strengthening the credibility of research findings. Our mixed method design gave us broad (via quantitative) and deep (via qualitative) insights into the three main research questions. The research used the following methods to gather information.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

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Throughout the study period the research team reviewed literature and documents relevant to all three main research questions. The literature review included compiling demographic data of recent immigrants in the selected sites. An extensive review of academic literature and other grey literature (including denominational reports) was also conducted as a means of providing a fuller context to the study findings. Advisory committee members contributed in identifying relevant literature for review. Literature references can be found in the appendix.

### FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS

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We conducted focus groups with church leaders in each of the five study sites. The purpose of these focus groups was to gain ground-level insights about how local immigrants experienced church and how well local congregations were welcoming and integrating recent immigrants. Participants also provided suggestions about how churches in their city could better welcome and include recent immigrants (see appendix for focus group questions).

Two focus groups each were conducted in Hamilton, Vancouver, and Montreal, while six were held in Toronto. One teleconference was held in Winnipeg. A total of 74 people attended the focus groups: Vancouver (9), Winnipeg (2), Hamilton (14), Toronto (34) and Montreal (15). Wherever possible, participants were recruited to include a mix of perspectives. Our criteria for recruiting people

included trying to involve both immigrants and non-immigrants, as well as having a range in age, country of origin, denominational affiliation and gender.

Focus groups were conducted in English by site researchers who received training from CCBR researchers about how to recruit and facilitate focus groups. We made sure to have all participants give us their informed consent prior to the interview. Following the focus group, facilitators passed along their detailed descriptive and analytical notes to the CCBR research team for analysis. For their part, advisory committee members helped to finalize the sampling criteria, the interview questions, and guided the process of participant recruitment.

### KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS

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We held two rounds of telephone key informant interviews. Key informants were people who gave us a “balcony view” from a national or city-wide level. This meant that they could answer questions beyond their own personal experience or the experience of their own congregation. All key informants were interviewed individually by CCBR staff. The project advisory committee helped to finalize the sampling criteria and the interview questions, as well as identify potential participants. The list of key informants and the questions we asked them can be found in the appendix.

Our first round of key informant interviews was at the national level. We held telephone interviews with a total of five people in different cities across Canada. The people we interviewed were church or denominational leaders who could speak to our three main research questions from a national and inter-denominational perspective. The criteria we used to select participants included having immigrant and non-immigrant denominational leaders, having regional representation across

Canada, and having people from different denominational backgrounds. All interviews were conducted in English.

The second round of key informant interviews was at the local city level. We conducted 15 telephone interviews, three from each of our five study sites. Local key informants were people who could speak to our main research questions from an inter-denominational perspective across their city. The criteria we used to select participants were similar to national key informants. All the interviews were conducted in English (except for one local key informant interview from Montreal, which was conducted in French). Interviews were tape-recorded with the permission of key informants.

### ON-LINE SURVEY

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We conducted an online survey targeting all Canadian urban churches in the nine cities that proportionally have the highest immigrant populations in Canada.<sup>1</sup> All nine cities had a foreign-born population that was higher than the 20% national average.

The survey was developed after an extensive review of literature that provided a theoretical framework to answer the study's main research questions. The questions were a combination of open and closed ended and included six sections: demographics, vision for immigrant integration, structures that facilitate immigrant integration, processes that facilitate immigrant integration, success and challenges, and future directions. The survey design and implementation was carried out by the research team leader as part of his PhD studies at Wilfrid Laurier University.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Based on 2006 Census Metropolitan Area data. In rank order: Toronto, Vancouver, Abbotsford, Calgary, Hamilton, Windsor, Kitchener, Montreal, Guelph. Churches in Winnipeg and Halifax were also invited to complete the survey given the presence of World Vision in those cities. However, with less than 20% immigrant population, findings from these cities were not included in the analysis of survey results.

<sup>2</sup> The survey used an ecological perspective that

After being pilot tested by advisory committee members, an invitation to complete the survey was disseminated by email to church leaders between April-June 2010. We knew from other studies (e.g., McGrew and Cnaan, 2006), that reaching all churches in a given city by email would be challenging if not impossible. To best meet this challenge we decided on a two-stage process. First we invited churches from databases more likely to consist of established churches in Canada. We started with the World Vision church database (1,595 churches in the nine cities, mostly Protestant), and invited Catholic dioceses in the nine cities to distribute the survey (in the end only the Montreal diocese distributed the survey to about 200 parishes). About 7% of churches in this sample completed the survey (English=96; French=19).

Our second strategy was to use snow ball sampling in an attempt to reach congregations less likely to be included within established church databases. We asked advisory committee members to circulate the survey link to others in their network. Some larger databases included those of organizations equipping the start-up of new churches (Outreach Canada and Church Planting Canada). In addition the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada and the periodical *Christian Weekly* included links to the survey on their respective websites. A total of 155 churches (English = 142; French =3) responded to this second strategy. Given that we have no way of determining how many congregations eventually received the invitation to complete the survey through this link, a response rate could not be calculated for this second sample frame.

The survey was available in English and French and directed to lead clergy/pastors. The survey therefore provides a congregational self-assessment from a

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considered vision, structure and process domains needed for systems change. Detailed survey metrics and findings are planned to be disseminated in forthcoming academic journal articles.

leader's perspective rather than the perspective of a typical church member. Congregations were asked to complete the survey only once in the event of cross-posting.

In the end, a total of 355 congregations from a variety of denominations, sizes, ages and cities, entered the survey with 260 completing beyond the demographic section to provide useful data. Survey findings cannot be seen to be representative of the full Canadian church experience, and they are likely skewed towards churches most likely making efforts to respond to their recent immigrant neighbours. However, survey respondents do provide novel and valuable insights into a range of congregations, particularly among those most confronted with the Canadian immigrant reality.

#### COMMUNITY FORUMS

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Three community forums were held, one each in Vancouver, Hamilton and Toronto. The purpose of these forums was to verify research findings and develop concrete

action steps. These forums were open to all community members. However, research participants (i.e., key informants, focus group participants, and individuals and organisations who received survey invitation) in particular were invited to attend. In total the forums drew 57 participants: Toronto (30), Vancouver (12), and Hamilton (15).

#### DATA ANALYSIS

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Data analysis was carried out collaboratively by the research team to ensure that research themes were identified and confirmed by multiple team members. Furthermore, preliminary research findings were presented to members of the advisory committee and to participants of the community forum for further verification. Members of the advisory committee also provided their input to the final report. The survey data was analyzed using MS Excel and SPSS. The qualitative data from key informant interviews and focus groups was analyzed using content analysis.

### 1.6 HOW THE REPORT IS ORGANIZED

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We begin this report with a rationale as to why this research study was carried out. This is followed by three sections that mirror the study's three main research questions. First we report on what our research findings say about how recent immigrants experience

church in Canada. Next is a summary of how churches are responding to recent immigrants. We conclude with future strategies for churches in Canada to better welcome and integrate recent immigrants.

## 2. WHY THIS RESEARCH STUDY

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Canada is one of three historical immigrant receiving countries in the world (the United States and Australia being the other two). However, recent changes to Federal immigration policies have led to an abrupt shift in who is entering Canada. Rather than traditional source countries within Western Europe and the United States, today's recent immigrants come from diverse world regions, notably Asia (Statistics Canada, 2009). As a result, in just one generation the cultural face of Canadian society has been transformed. Nowhere is this more obvious than in Canada's largest urban centres where most immigrants land (Statistics Canada, 2006). Many segments of Canadian society are seriously grappling with how to best respond to this reality of growing cultural diversity (e.g., Janzen, 2010; Alboim, 2009).

Canada's cultural diversity presents both a challenge and an opportunity for the Canadian church. There is the challenge for the recent immigrant believer who is seeking to become settled and included in a new, sometimes strange homeland. There is also the challenge for the established Canadian church which needs to adapt their attitudes, practices and structures to make way for new expressions of Christianity. However, these challenges bring exciting opportunities. For example, the coming of diverse people to Canada provides an opportunity for the Canadian church to support the "diaspora in mission" right in their own backyard. In addition, recent immigrant church leaders are a latent source of leadership for the Canadian church, both among immigrants and host Canadians.

There is still much to learn (and do) in order

to maximize these opportunities. To begin, we know little about how churches in Canada are presently responding to the cultural diversity around them. Immigration research that considers issues of religion is beginning to emerge in Canada (Bramadat & Biles, 2005; Conner, 2009; Koenig, 2005). Yet very few studies have considered the processes and outcomes of recent immigrant integration within Canada's most common religious settings—Christian church congregations.

The limited studies that do exist focus on a narrow range of Christian denominations or within single geographic communities (e.g. Ley, 2008; Neufeld, 2001; Vaughan, 2009). We also know little about how recent immigrants experience church in Canada and how this experience relates to their general settlement experience. Finally we know little about the strategies and structures that are needed to bridge the gap between recent immigrants and churches in Canada. These strategies and structures are needed if the Christian church is to be faithful and effective in today's multicultural Canada.

This research study attempted to address this knowledge gap. But more than gain new knowledge, we also intended the study to mobilize this knowledge into action. A participatory action research approach was therefore intentionally used as a catalyst to deepen the relationships and discussion among church leaders that is so needed. Through its various activities, the research project involved a broad inter-denominational coalition of recent immigrant and established church leaders.

Our own experience of conducting this study confirmed that it was needed. From survey respondents, to key informants and focus group participants, research participants affirmed the timeliness of this study. In particular, they acknowledged that we needed to collectively learn from each other about how to better respond to the immigrant reality in Canada. In addition, our research participants pointed out two motivations for why churches in Canada's cities should be paying attention to this topic.

The first motivation was theological. For example, participants pointed to the Biblical mandate to "welcome the stranger" and to love the (increasingly multicultural) neighbour as providing the impetus for welcoming to and integrating recent immigrants into church life. The second motivation was sociological. Churches need to respond to demographic trends – they need to remain relevant to a culturally diverse society in which they now find themselves. For some participants who held this view, the very survival of the church in Canada was at stake.

Underlying both of these motivations was the assumption that change is required. Newcomers must change as they try to adapt to a new home country. But churches also must change and adapt to their evolving communities. This assumption is consistent with other immigration research and with public policy that views immigrant adaptation as a "two-way street". Such a view sees

"The more we see this [need to welcome immigrants] as a Biblical mandate, [the more] it changes our motivation." (Local Key Informant)

"We need an awareness of Biblical truth...and recognize our theological mandate to go to all nations...the church as a house of all nations." (National Key Informant)

"Unless immigrants are integrated, churches will die." (National Key Informant)

"My church was dominantly white, but the neighbourhood has become diverse so we have started things to start to reach out into our community." (Focus Group Participant)

"There is an increasing reality that the future of Canada is going to look less and less like people like myself. I'm wondering if people in congregations are coming to terms with this fact." (National Key Informant)

adaptation as bi-directional involving change from both the newcomer and the host (see Janzen et al., 2007).

### 3. HOW RECENT IMMIGRANTS EXPERIENCE CHURCH

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A good first step in understanding how churches are responding (or can respond better) to the immigrant reality in Canada is to consider the perspectives of recent immigrants. This section does just that.

The perspectives of recent immigrants can tell us about areas where Canadian churches are performing well in welcoming and integrating recent immigrants. They can also

give us insights about strategies and actions that churches can adopt to do a better job.

This section is divided into two parts. The first section provides some contextual factors that influence how recent immigrants experience church in Canada. The second part discusses the extent to which recent immigrants have a sense of belonging to church.

#### 3.1 CHURCH EXPERIENCE DEPENDS ON THE CONTEXT

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All recent immigrants do not experience church in Canada in the same way. Their experience is influenced by any number of factors related to the context in which they live. It is perhaps obvious to say, but each recent immigrant is a unique individual, each within his/her own unique context.

Still our research findings did point to a few main themes of what influences recent immigrant experiences of church. We list these below. Recognizing these factors is a good starting point in discussing how churches can better welcome and integrate recent immigrants.

##### CHURCH IS EXPERIENCED WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF ... A LARGER PROCESS OF SETTLEMENT AND ADAPTATION

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We found that recent immigrants experience church within the context of their experience of settling and adapting to a new country. In fact, the church experience cannot be separated from this larger context. “The immigrant church experience is not isolated from the settlement experience of being an immigrant”, said one national key informant.

Recent immigrants are constantly navigating between two cultures: their previous home culture and their new host culture. They go through a process of negotiating which

cultural norms from the past they should hold on to and which to let go. They also consider what to adopt or what to resist of their new culture. These decisions relate to many parts of their life including parenting, friendships, employment, and community involvement to name a few. These decisions also relate to their spiritual life (which we cover in the next point below).

The process of adapting to change can be easy or difficult. For example, recent immigrants may come from home cultures which are more or less similar to a western country such as Canada. Recent immigrants may or may not have extended family members or others of their cultural background around them to help them adjust. They may land in a city with well developed networks of services for immigrants, or in a city which is less welcoming and less supportive to newcomers. Recent immigrants may come to Canada out of a refugee experience in which they were forced to flee their homeland. Or they may have chosen to come to Canada under the economic immigration class – having been accepted by gaining high points for such traits as high education, previous work experience and the ability to speak English or French.

All of the factors mentioned above (and more) shape how recent immigrants adjust to their new Canadian homeland. Despite their differences, there is one common priority among all recent immigrants. All need to have their basic and immediate settlement needs met. These needs include practical necessities such as finding adequate and affordable housing, finding employment (preferably in their field of training and experience), learning or improving their English or French, finding schools for their children and understanding the school system, and meeting their health care needs.

The process of settlement and integration impacts the way church is experienced by recent immigrants in a number of ways. For example, recent immigrants who somehow became connected with a church and received support in their settlement may have a very positive experience of church. On the other hand, the Canadian church may not have been present in this time of settlement. In some cases, recent immigrants may expect churches to be a place of support (given their experience of supportive churches in the past) and are disappointed if they do not find this support forthcoming in Canada.

Finally, for some recent immigrants the struggle of settlement may make it difficult to find time for church activities. Research participants noted that the demands of a job search or of holding down multiple “survival jobs” deflected immigrants from church life. They also noted the frequent mobility of some immigrants (moving from one place to another in search of a better place to settle and live) as making it difficult to put down roots in a church family. However, the flip side was also true: the challenges of settlement drew some to church. The church was seen as a body that could help in their settlement and adaptation to Canada.

“You have people coming into your office saying, “Pastor, I need this...Pastor, where

“The brand new immigrant is lost, and may not come with a church background. They come in looking for other services.” (Focus Group Participant)

“Some have a sense of going to church for different reasons depending on how it’s seen in their culture.” (Local Key Informant)

“A lot of immigrants get into the Canadian culture without fully realizing the dangers. They end up in...divorce and breakdowns. The church should be the answer to those in need. But unfortunately the church is not ready to receive them.” (Focus Group Participant)

“In Latin cultural kids do not spend the night at friends, or hear much about abortion, etc. They come here and things are different. In schools they get a different messages and this is a challenge in the church.” (Focus Group Participant)

can I go to learn English...where can I go to take my driver’s license test...where can I go to apply for housing...how can I get cheap housing...” There are all these kinds of questions.” (Focus Group Participant)

#### CHURCH IS EXPERIENCED WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF ... SPIRITUAL AND RELIGIOUS DIFFERENCES

A recent immigrant’s experience of church is also influenced by their spiritual or religious background. Some recent immigrants come to Canada with a Christian background. However, the expression (or practice) of church in their home country may be very different from what they find in Canada. For example, research participants mentioned that in some cultures there is a much stronger emphasis on prayer (e.g., regular all



night prayer meetings) than what immigrants experience in Canada. For example, in Canada they may be surprised to find less zeal for prayer, and consequently a lower emphasis on spiritual submission, discernment and healing. In the words of one focus group participant:

“My personal life relies on prayer. I would go to pray for four hours which I can't really find here. That's a challenge but I'm coping with it. I have gone to three or four churches looking for one that focuses on prayer.”

Other recent immigrants find the style of worship in Canadian churches more individualistic. They also find less of a sense of community within Canadian churches than what they previously experienced. One local key informant summed up differences in this way: “Western churches focus on structure, governance, policy. Immigrants focus on relationship, spirit, celebration...”

Some immigrants to Canada find themselves living in a secular country for the first time. They may experience value conflicts and tensions between the predominately secular societal norms of Canada and what the norms that they expect Christians (or believers of other religions) to uphold. Societal acceptance of abortion, divorce, homosexuality and women in leadership were the most frequently mentioned value clashes. While not true for all recent immigrants, research participants noted that many recent immigrants are surprised at what they perceive as liberal views of Canadian Christians and consider the Canadian church response to secular influences as being weak.

It is true that some recent immigrant Christians may become quickly involved in Canadian churches. Yet our research also pointed out that the conflicting spiritual practices and values mentioned above make it difficult for many others to find a church home. In response, an increasing number of recent immigrants seek to establish their own

“I go from church to church to find what we had back home. We had zeal to pray and seek God.” (Focus Group Participant)

“The West has become more individualistic and for them [immigrants] it's more holistic and a stronger sense of community.” (Local Key Informant)

“Immigrants wonder how to function in a godless society when they were raised in a Christian society.” (National Key Informant)

“Immigrants do not get adjusted to the culture of established churches [and rather establish their own churches].” (Focus Group Participant)

“Newcomers want to find a church that reflects their language and culture.” (National Key Informant)

ethno-specific churches, particularly in Canada's larger cities. Such ethnically-based immigrant churches not only act as a “community centre” where cultural identity, language and social relationships are maintained, they also act as a “spiritual centre” where immigrants can freely worship according to their cultural norms and traditions (Ley, 2008). We will further discuss the rising phenomenon of ethno-specific immigrants' churches in the next section.

Not all recent immigrants are Christians. In fact, a growing number of recent immigrants come to Canada with a non-Christian background. Census data shows us that while those identifying with Christianity remained relatively consistent between 1991 and 2001, affiliation with other religions increased dramatically, including Muslims (129% increase), Buddhists, Hindu and Sikhs

(each over 80%) (Statistics Canada, 2001). This growth is largely due to immigration. For recent immigrants holding non-Christian religious beliefs—or who have no religious affiliation at all—the experience of church in Canada may range from frequent to no contact. For those who do have direct contact with churches, it may likely be for reasons other than spiritual. Many recent immigrants access the many practical settlement services offered by churches or para-church organizations.

### CHURCH IS EXPERIENCED WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF ... GENERATIONAL DIFFERENCES

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A third major contextual factor is that of generation. That is to say, church experience depends in part on whether a recent immigrant is younger or older; whether a parent or a youth. Generational differences were expressed in two main ways. First, generational differences come into play in terms of conflicting views about such family matters as inter-cultural marriages and parenting. The older generation of immigrants tend to be less enthusiastic about mixed or inter-cultural marriages than their children are. In parenting, the older generations are more likely to emphasize maintenance of past cultural norms and values than their 'westernized' children desire. Parents and children each may look to the church to reinforce their desired position. How the Canadian church responds can impact how an adult or youth immigrant experiences church.

In the words of one focus group participant:

“There can be a tension between

“Mixed marriages are a much bigger issue for immigrant church members and leaders than I realized.” (Focus Group Facilitator Reflection)

“More intercultural marriages are happening... but it is an issue with ‘new’ immigrants who are against mixed marriages and families.” (Focus Group Participant)

“The younger ones really don’t associate that much with their past culture, they are more Canadian now.” (Focus Group Participant)

“Second generation of immigrants will be integrated and participate a lot more in church life. Second generation will also have lost their language of origin.” (Local Key Informant)

westernized kids and their immigrant

parents. This is reflected in such things as ‘how do we honour family, but also have the freedom to make our own choices and decisions?’ It’s a struggle that is seen at both a family and a church level.”

Second, research participants pointed out that it is immigrant parents who are more likely to gravitate to ethno-specific churches to maintain the language and culture. The younger generation is less likely to maintain affiliation with ethnic churches over the long term. As a result, youth are more likely to join more “Canadianized” churches, or leave church altogether.

### 3.2 CHURCH EXPERIENCE AND A LIMITED SENSE OF BELONGING

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In addition to the importance of context, our research revealed another general theme about how recent immigrants experience church in Canada. This theme relates to the

degree to which recent immigrants have a sense of belonging to church.

On the positive, many research participants

pointed out that if recent immigrants did visit a church they generally felt welcomed. They noted that churches in Canadian cities generally try to initially welcome people from different cultures, particularly during the Sunday morning worship service. What is more, churches in Canada were generally seen responding to the initial settlement needs of recent immigrants (whether formally through programs, or spontaneously on an individual basis).

While appreciative of the initial welcome, many research participants pointed out that this welcome was too often limited. Recent immigrants frequently did not feel that they were given the opportunity to be more fully included and involved in church life. In other words, if there was a welcome, many times it was experienced as being “superficial” or lacking “depth”.

“On the whole, they [recent immigrants] feel initial welcome, people are happy to see them on a superficial level.” (Local Key Informant)

To illustrate, participants noted that recent immigrants were often not accepted within leadership and decision-making positions of churches in Canada. There was also a perception that immigrant talents, gifts and skills were not accepted or adequately utilized. While there were certainly important exceptions (which we highlight below), it was believed that too often recent immigrants do not feel a deep sense of belonging within churches in Canada. Some participants went so far as to say that recent immigrants feel excluded from church. As one local key informant stated: “[There is a] feeling of

“Since new immigrants do not feel welcomed by Canadian churches, they move to ethnic ‘shelters’ [churches].” (Focus Group Participant)

“[Immigrants] find the established churches not using their talents, so they end up going to the ethnic language churches.” (Focus Group Participant)

“Recent immigrants don’t feel welcome in terms of greater involvement and integration.” (Local Key Informant)

“It is hard to find immigrant leaders leading ‘Canadian’ congregations or ministries.” (Focus Group Participant)

“[Immigrant gifts] are not really acknowledged enough in the light of how multicultural we are in Canada. We white Canadians have work to do.” (National Key Informant)

exclusion from the core of church life.”

This lack of involvement and inclusion is another reason why many recent immigrants turn to ethno-specific immigrant churches. They feel that ethno-specific churches are more open and embracing of them, and quicker to value and utilize their giftedness. As a result, recent immigrants who attend ethno-specific churches generally develop a deeper sense of belonging with other church members and feel included in church life.

## 4. HOW CHURCHES ARE RESPONDING TO RECENT IMMIGRANTS

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This section explores how churches in Canadian cities are currently responding to the immigrant reality. Naturally, this response varies among churches. There are some churches whose central focus is to reach out to and involve recent immigrants within their congregation (e.g., many ethno-specific immigrant congregations). Other churches have little contact with recent immigrants. Our intent, however, is to highlight a trend across churches.

Generally, we found a growing trend toward welcoming and integrating recent immigrants among urban Canadian churches. However, in many ways this movement is still limited and needs to mature in depth. What is more (and mirroring the perceptions of recent immigrants we covered in the previous section); individual congregations are more likely to see themselves as doing well in

initially welcoming recent immigrants. They are less likely to claim to be doing well in the “deeper work” of including recent immigrants into the fullness of church life.

A goal of this research study was to nudge churches forward in better responding to their increasingly multicultural communities. Our hope in discussing the trend in this section is for churches to reflect on where they fit in it. After all, understanding where we are at in a process of change provides insights as to what steps should be taken next.

This section is organized around two main themes of a positive trend, but a trend that lacks depth. In addition, we highlight what is hindering Canadian churches from better welcoming and integrating recent immigrants.

### 4.1 A POSITIVE TREND: A GROWING RESPONSE

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Our research findings point to a movement toward welcoming and integrating recent immigrants among churches in Canadian cities. This movement was placed in the context of a long history of Canadian churches that have welcomed newcomers and provided asylum to refugees in need (regardless of their faith tradition). However, there were a number of indicators that research participants pointed out in support of a recent positive trend. These indicators highlight a growing and more generalized response across urban churches in Canada. Below we highlight these indicators in order of perceived magnitude.

#### INCREASED AWARENESS AND A GROWING DESIRE

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We found that over time there has been an increased awareness among many Canadian urban churches of the need to be more

welcoming to diverse recent immigrants. With this recognition have come other insights as well. For example, church members have gained awareness of cultures different than their own, of the Canadian immigration system, and of immigrant supports available in the community.

But perhaps most notable has been a new awareness of what recent immigrants can bring to Canadian churches – how they can positively impact churches. Research participants used words such as “blessing”, “richness”, “joy inducing”, “freshness in adding new ideas”, and “new life” to describe the benefits that recent immigrants brought to their congregation. Others spoke of how their relationships with immigrants helped them to be “more outward looking” and “less self-centered”, including a renewed interest in overseas mission. In the words of one survey respondent:

“We have been enriched by a broader understanding of our world. We have learned a greater appreciation of social injustice and how we might serve to do better.”

This increased awareness has resulted in a growing desire of churches to be more intentional in welcoming recent immigrants. Research participants noted how churches in Canada have become more open and embracing than a decade ago. Immigrant inclusion has increasingly become important for church leaders and pastors, and membership in many churches has become more ethnically diverse. For example, one focus group participant stated: “10 years ago our church was 95% Anglo, now we’re about 30-40% visible minority.”

Our survey of 260 Canadian churches also punctuated this growing desire. Church leaders completing the survey reported that they were generally active in casting a vision within their congregation towards immigrant integration. (In contrast they were much less active in developing new structures or processes to help recent immigrants integrate). In particular, the promotion of principles and values towards immigrant integration tended to be emphasized. For example, respondents said that the following actions were generally or always done:

- Members of our congregation are encouraged to welcome and include people around them regardless of their culture, language or race. (80% )
- Recent immigrants and Canadian-born are encouraged to work collaboratively with each other in our church ministries, and to do so in such a way that the responsibilities and benefits are mutually shared. (57%)
- Our congregation's leaders stress that reaching out to and including recent immigrants is a part of our church culture and mission. (52%)

“Our church has a motel ministry [for refugee claimants]. There are two low income motels close to our church and we serve every Saturday night a meal for everybody who lives there...so we have a big team there trying to show the light of Jesus to these people.” (Focus Group Participant)

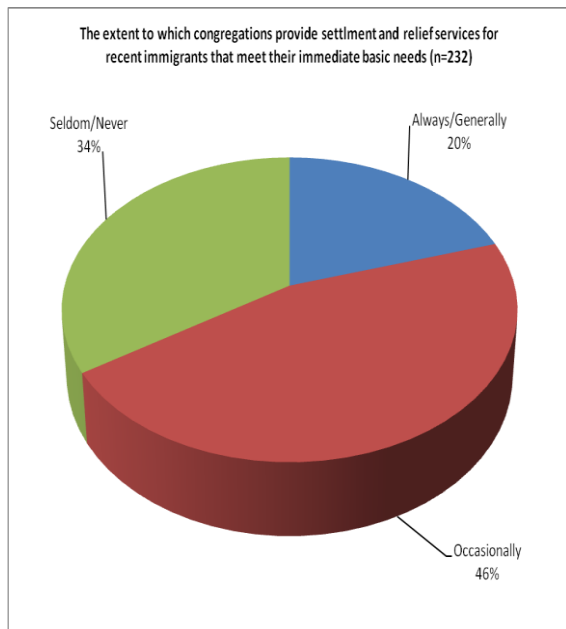
“We started with another program because of a need for food. We started a Food Market. We invited the church to prepare coffee, juice, make pizza, make relationships and then give them lots of groceries. It was targeted to the immigrant, mostly Spanish.” (Focus Group Participant)

## FULFILLING BASIC SETTLEMENT AND RELIEF NEEDS

Another indicator of the positive trend has been the efforts of churches to help recent immigrants meet their basic settlement and relief needs. These efforts include meeting such practical needs as housing, food, employment support, and information about the community. Most frequently mentioned was the efforts churches across Canada are making in providing a range of English or French language supports for recent immigrants in Canada. Language support is provided through such programs as conversational circles, reading clubs, English learner Bible studies, and in some case through formal government-funded English as a Second Language (ESL) classes.

Providing settlement and relief services for recent immigrants that meet their immediate basic needs was the most common ministry program mentioned by survey respondents. Two thirds of congregations (66%) reported that they always or occasionally provide such

services (see chart below). Other churches reported contributing financial or in-kind resources to organizations or groups that serve recent immigrants or refugees (33% always do this; 38% occasionally do this).



Our research also identified a number of church coalitions or networks that have arisen in order to meet immigrant and refugee settlement needs. Although each are structured differently, the networks share a goal of combining church resources towards collectively meeting settlement needs.

### THE RISE OF ETHNO-SPECIFIC IMMIGRANT CONGREGATIONS

As mentioned previously, ethno-specific immigrant congregations are on the rise in Canada. These congregations are predominately made up of immigrants from a common ethnic heritage and language. While ethno-specific immigrant congregations have existed in Canada for generations (Ley, 2008), what is new is the growing number and diversity (both ethnically and structurally) of these churches. This is particularly evident in larger urban centres and where ethnic communities reach a certain critical mass. Forums that connect ethno-specific immigrant church leaders to each other and to other

resources are also beginning to emerge, For example, the TIM Centre, one of the study partners, plays such a role of “Diaspora leaders” in the Greater Toronto Area. We have already noted the positive aspects of ethno-specific immigrant congregations in fulfilling both social and spiritual needs. Some recent immigrants are attracted to these congregations because they help to maintain cultural identity, language and social ties. They provide an opportunity for recent immigrants to worship and carry out church in style and substance that is familiar. Their spiritual gifts are more readily acknowledged and utilized. In addition, research participants pointed out that recent immigrants perceive these congregations to have a better understanding of their experiences as immigrants, and to have greater awareness of their needs.

Our research was not an exhaustive investigation of ethno-specific immigrant congregations. Still, we did gain some insights through our interviews and survey (e.g., about 16% of survey respondents were leading congregations in which immigrants made up over 75% of their regular attendees). We learned that ethno-specific immigrant congregations are less likely to be aligned to traditional denominations in Canada, or to any denomination for that matter. If aligned, their “denominational headquarters” may reside outside of Canada. Some congregations are the result of church planting efforts by missionaries sent to Canada by Christians in other countries.

We also learned that many of these congregations seemed to be highly relational, responding to recent immigrants spontaneously and informally, not necessarily through planned activities and programs. Immigrants within these churches were seen less as a “target population”, than as neighbours and as members of their community. In the words of one survey respondent:

“Ministry with immigrants’ is not something we think about. We are the immigrants...We

don't focus on the immigrant population. We focus on our neighbours who are from other places.”

By including the rise of ethno-specific immigrant congregations as an indicator of a Canadian church movement toward responding to recent immigrants, we are recognizing a shift on the urban Canadian church landscape. Ethno-specific immigrant congregations are increasingly being woven into the fabric of the “Canadian church”. What is more, immigrant church leaders (whether in ethno-specific immigrant congregations or elsewhere) are playing an ever-increasing leadership role in promoting and modelling how churches can truly welcome and integrate recent immigrants. Other churches in Canada have much to learn from this leadership—a leadership role likely only to increase in importance in the future.

#### INCREASING EFFORTS TO DEVELOP PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

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A final indicator, albeit less often noted, was the efforts that members of urban churches were making to develop personal relationships and friendships with recent immigrants. Churches facilitated such relationship-building in part by organizing social, recreational and other informal cultural events. Most notable were events that involved food. These events were seen to be

“We celebrate the diversity of the different members of our church through activities; Haitian community meals prepared and served by Haitian members.” (Focus Group Participant)

“It’s all about social and family events in terms of true involvement for majority of immigrants and refugees in our congregation.” (Focus Group Participant)

more than simply sharing food, but a means of celebrating diversity and creating a mutual bond of friendship cross-culturally.

Other mechanisms used to develop personal relationship included placing recent immigrants within smaller gatherings of church members who meet regularly for support, prayer and study (e.g., Alpha or “growth” groups). Some churches intentionally connected recent immigrants with other church members who shared affinity of culture, language or common interest. Still other churches simply stressed informal relationships; relationships similar to other friendships that are characterised by mutual giving and receiving. In the words of one survey respondent: “Authentic love and caring creates relationships that create community – this is the premise we work on for everyone, not just recent immigrants.”

#### 4.2 A TREND LACKING DEPTH: LIMITATIONS IN THE RESPONSE

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Not all was seen to be positive. A few research participants even questioned whether a positive trend actually existed. These participants were impatient and disappointed with how churches were responding to their changing demographic reality. What research participants did agree upon, however, was that the depth of response of urban churches to welcome and integrate recent immigrants was still lacking in a number of ways.

##### A LACK OF DEPTH IN BUILDING PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

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Despite the positive indications of the relationship-building mentioned above, these signs were too few and far between for many research participants. At a congregational level, churches were typically seen to prefer and perform well in running formal programs for recent immigrants. Fewer churches were likely to emphasize establishing and maintaining mutual relationships among

recent immigrants and church members. Churches that did have a relational emphasis seldom did so by accident. Typically, church leadership promoted the importance of an inclusive community, and modelled relationship-building in their lives. At an individual level, the depth of personal relationship between recent immigrants and other church members was limited. While church members might be friendly at a certain level, deeper friendships were less common.

“There is not a lot of personal investment in the relationship where you learn of their [recent immigrants] personal experience.”  
(Local Key Informant)

This was particularly true of churches that had few immigrant members. While establishing authentic relationships and friendships is not necessarily easy and requires time and effort, the strategies outlined on the previous page provide examples of how some churches were meeting this challenge.

Forum participants noted that this lack of depth in building personal relationships was reflective of the Canadian society in general. That is to say, lacking depth in personal relationships was not necessarily unique to Canadian-born churchgoers but to other Canadians as well. However, forum participants challenged the Church to not be content in simply living out the norms of the dominant Canadian society. For many, living out the example and teachings of Jesus meant an intentional investment into the personal lives of others.

#### A LACK OF DEPTH IN INVOLVING IMMIGRANTS IN THE LIFE OF THE CONGREGATION

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Our church survey asked respondents to indicate whether people who recently came to Canada generally received a warm welcome by members of their congregation. Sixty percent strongly agreed. When asked whether recent immigrants were generally

integrated well in the life of the congregation, the response dropped to 32%. This finding is indicative of another way that the church response to recent immigrants is lacking depth: meaningful involvement. Churches were seen to need to move beyond the initial welcome that recent immigrants might experience (particularly during Sunday morning worship). Respondents noted that congregations might be happy to see recent immigrants coming through their doors. They were less successful and intentional about integrating recent immigrants in various aspects of church life. In the words of one survey respondent:

“We’ve been welcoming well, but taking that to the ‘next level’ and connecting them to meaningful life in the body [of the church] has been a struggle.”

This lack of involvement was perceived to be structural in nature and expressed in a number of ways. Recent immigrants were lacking in opportunities for leadership. They were too seldom given the opportunity to shape the vision and direction of the congregation. Fifty-nine percent of survey respondents said that their congregational leaders never or just occasionally stress that it is important for recent immigrants to be given opportunity to serve and lead within the church.

“Churches are always very welcoming initially when it comes to welcoming newcomers to the church – strong in charity and meeting the material needs of new immigrants. However, when it comes to integrating immigrants in the decision making process and leadership of churches, the established leadership churches will be very closed.” (Local Key Informant)

Finally, very few congregations made efforts to accommodate the language of recent immigrants in worship and in ministry programs. Language accommodations were among the least likely actions that survey respondents reported. Language accommodations could include using multiple



languages or providing interpretation within worship services or ministry programs, providing translation of promotional and education materials, and having multilingual church staff.

#### A LACK OF DEPTH IN REACHING OUT TO RECENT IMMIGRANTS

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The church response also lacked depth in its outreach. Churches might be doing well to initially welcome recent immigrants who came to their doorstep. Less common were those churches who intentionally reached out to the recent immigrants living in the surrounding community.

While offering programs to meet basic settlement needs was the most common form of outreach, other ministry opportunities were limited. Survey findings showed that the majority of churches seldom or never provided community development, systemic change or evangelistic activities or programs for recent immigrants.

Outreach implies an external focus and a willingness to meet people in their “places of comfort” (not simply expecting people to find the church building). Outreach also implies a desire to “bless” and have a concern for the welfare of recent immigrants (not simply as a means of recruiting new church members). Research participants noted that such intentional outreach efforts would help recent immigrants feel valued as people. In addition, church outreach would help recent immigrants come to know their local churches – some do not even know about the existence of churches in their neighbourhoods.

#### A LACK OF DEPTH IN PARTNERSHIPS AMONG CHURCHES AND GROUPS

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There were a limited number of partnerships among churches, para-church organizations and immigrant settlement organizations. Research participants observed that generally churches were working individually

“I think that the church has made a very poor job in the welcoming and integrating [immigrants] in this country.” (Focus Group Participant)

“The church is 30 years behind. We had this [cross cultural training] seminar 30 years ago with the police force. You would think that we as churches would be more desperate. But we are not. We are in a false sense of security.” (National Key Informant)

“Some churches do better than others. What is common is a superficial kind of thing where we have international dinner and dress. But we don’t change the values and practices within our congregations. Congregations don’t accept those levels of change.” (National Key Informant)

in silos in responding to recent immigrants. Interaction among churches and formal networks was seen to be lacking (see notably exceptions in the previous section). Of particular concern was the minimal interaction among ethno-specific churches and other more established Canadian churches. This lack of interaction was seen to limit opportunities for exchanging experiences, resources and lessons among each other.

Finally some participants noted a lack of denominational leadership in this area. While some denominations have provided multicultural and anti-racism resources, training and leadership (see references in the appendix), much more could be done to better equip local congregations, and facilitate learning exchanges across congregations.

## LIMITATIONS OF THE ETHNO-SPECIFIC IMMIGRANT CONGREGATION

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While there were positives of the rise of ethno-specific immigrant churches, significant limitations were also noted. We already mentioned generational challenges – of the younger generation being less likely to remain within these churches over time. The result is that ethno-specific immigrant congregations face pressures of declining membership, especially if immigration from source countries wanes. In particular finding younger people to replace aging leaders is a challenge for many of these congregations over time. These challenges are not unfamiliar to many of Canada’s more established churches who at some point in their history needed to similarly grapple with declines in a traditional ethnic base.

There was another limitation of ethno-specific immigrant congregations in addition to these demographic pressures. An underlying assumption of this research study is that there are benefits to cross-cultural interaction. Research participants noted that, as with other monocultural churches, ethno-specific immigrant congregations need to make extra effort to facilitate cross-cultural interaction. Too often ethno-specific

“Sometimes ignorance, reluctance and racism prevent this [integration of immigrants].” (Local Key Informant)

“There is blindness to our prejudices and racism in our churches.” (Local Key Informant)

“I think it’s the healthiest thing to talk real like that and to get it open to each other. We don’t feel or express our racism out loud.” (Focus Group Participant)

immigrant congregations were seen not to make this effort, at least not until they were facing declining numbers and self preservation.

On a more practical side, many ethno-specific immigrant congregations were seen to lack financial resources. As a result, clergy were less likely to be paid full-time, even carried out their ministry on an entirely voluntary basis. In addition, church facilities were often limited as congregations search for affordable rent or donated space in which facility access may be restricted.

## 4.3 WHAT IS HINDERING THE RESPONSE OF CANADIAN CHURCHES?

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Our research provided valuable insights into what is hindering churches in Canada from better welcoming and integrating recent immigrants. Below we list the most common challenges.

Awareness of these challenges is a good first step in addressing them. Some challenges require changes to be made internally within a given congregation. Others require external support. This support can be expressed in the form of resources (written and financial), training initiatives, and collaborative efforts across congregations and denominations.

### A DESIRE TO MAINTAIN THE STATUS QUO

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Study participants told us that there was a culture of resistance among some congregation members and leaders to adapt and change. This resistance stemmed from a fear or concern that integrating recent immigrants would change the church landscape. While most congregations were willing to welcome recent immigrants into their church, many participants thought that churches expected them to function within the boundaries of existing church norms. In addition, church members were seen to have difficulty in relating with people of cultures different from their own and who speak

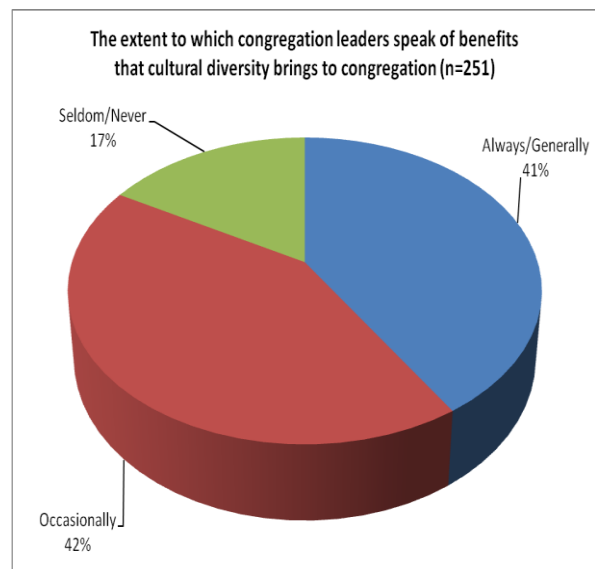
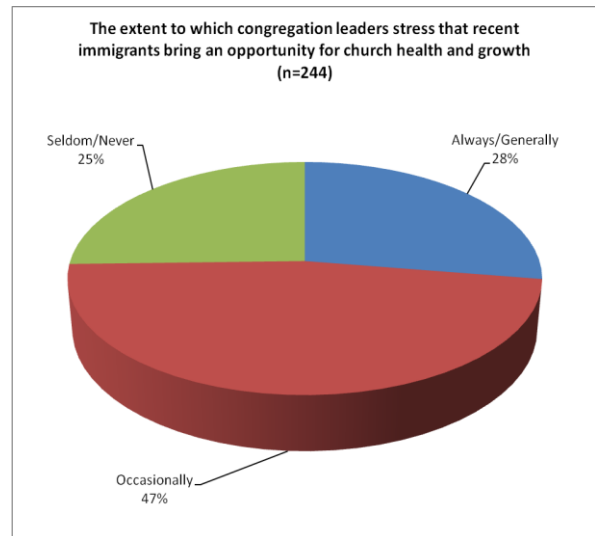
languages unfamiliar to them.

“I have met a number of pastors or church leaders from established or Caucasian churches, sometimes there is fear or concern because they don’t know what to make of this [demographic] change.” (Local Key Informant)

Research participants also pointed out that a desire to maintain the status quo was sometimes related to issues of power – of wanting to retain control of how the church operates. “Sometimes the mindset [of Canadian church members] is that we need to stay in power” said one local key informant. Fear of losing influence over the church was seen to be driving the resistance to providing opportunities for recent immigrants to have a voice in decision-making. Changing this culture of resistance was seen to require personal sacrifice and a willingness to overcome prejudices.

As the quote above illustrates, too often it was church leaders themselves who were seen to be contributing to the maintenance of the status quo. Too seldom were leaders casting an alternative vision in which the contributions of recent immigrants were valued and sought out. And too seldom were recent immigrants given the opportunity to share in leadership positions.

Our survey findings confirmed this point. The majority of the survey respondents (47%) stated that leaders in their church only occasionally stressed that recent immigrants brought an opportunity for church health and growth that would otherwise not be available, while one-quarter said their leaders seldom or never did so. On a related question, 59% of respondents said their leaders occasionally or never spoke of the benefits that cultural diversity brought to their church congregation (see charts below).



Research participants from Montreal, in particular, noted the resistance to changing the church’s culture in the face of changing demographics. Quebecois francophone church leadership was seen to be leery of providing leadership opportunities to recent immigrants lest Quebecois cultural identity would suffer.

“There is a worry from the Quebecois leadership that the immigrants who become the demographic majority will have too much influence.” (Local Key Informant)

## STEREOTYPES AND RACISM

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Related to the discussion of power above, study participants also named the existence of stereotypes and racism as hindering the response of Canadian churches. In particular, we heard of prejudices against immigrants that were sometimes shaped by the media. As one survey respondent stated:

“A few [church members] have long-standing biases that come out at inappropriate times. [For example:] We all know that a lot of the problems in our community are because of the immigrants, or we would not have lost our job if we didn't have immigrants.”

We also heard of a general lack of awareness and understanding about immigrants' experiences and perspectives, including stereotypical attitudes towards certain ethnic or racial groups. Taken together, these stereotypes served to reinforce an “us versus them” attitude between church members and recent immigrants thereby hindering meaningful interaction.

Racism was also mentioned by some of those we interviewed. More specifically, we heard that issues of racism – of the historical power and privilege of some racial groups over others – was too seldom acknowledged or addressed in the church context. Our church survey reinforced the qualitative opinion of our study participants. A majority of survey respondents (59%) reported that congregation leaders seldom or never raised awareness about the power and privilege of some racial group over others. Only 12% indicated that their congregational leaders generally or always did so. Rather than turning a blind eye, it was pointed out that church leaders needed to better recognize issues of racism and make efforts to tackle them.

## DIFFERENCES IN UNDERSTANDING CHURCH LEADERSHIP

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Study participants noted differences in

understanding the role and style of church leadership as hindering interactions between recent immigrants and Canadian church members. At the heart of this difference is the process of decision-making and the nature of authority. Many recent immigrants come from “high power distance” cultures where the positional authority of leadership is honoured and their decisions are seldom challenged. In these cultures, the opinion of clergy matters most, and respect for leadership is demonstrated by following their lead in decision-making.

Contrast this with the “low power distance” culture of many Canadian churches that emphasize shared decision-making among the membership. Such an individualistic and democratic view of decision-making creates structures in which lay members and clergy together share in running and shaping the direction of the congregation.

This difference in understanding leadership among recent immigrants and Canadian-born is frequently noted in church literature (e.g., Naylor, 2007). Our study re-affirmed the challenges of differing leadership expectations in integrating immigrants into church life.

“The integration of different cultures within leadership and how decision making gets done is a challenge. It will be easier to welcome them into the church but it will be difficult to lead with them [because their understanding of leadership is different].”  
(Focus Group Participant)

Beyond the congregational level, our study participants also pointed to denominational structural differences and how these differences impacted on the ability of churches to respond to recent immigrants. In general it was pointed out that it is more challenging to introduce the necessary changes in denominations with hierarchical structures than those in which congregations were more independent.

“A church that is more entrenched or

institutionalized (“top-down”) can be a more difficult environment in which to welcome change that is coming up from the grassroots; which is more the context for immigrants.” (Focus Group Participant)

### COMMUNICATION BARRIERS

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As with other institutions and organizations in Canada, churches face the challenges of communication. In part the challenge is related to not understanding the many languages of their new neighbours. In part the communication challenge is in not understanding the many cultural overtones of cross-cultural communication.

Study participants pointed out that these communication barriers hindered close interaction and impeded relationship building efforts among church members and recent immigrants. Because of communication barriers, recent immigrants tended to be more reserved and more likely to end up in an observer role rather than actively participating in church affairs. For congregation members it took more time and effort to work with recent immigrants to enable them to lead church activities (e.g. worship).

### LACK OF RESOURCES

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Study participants also acknowledged that congregations lack resources to effectively respond to the immigrant reality. Churches were seen to not have the capacity, skills, tools and strategies to deal with their community’s changing demographics. In addition they do not have enough human resources or volunteers to support them in their ministry to recent immigrants.

In particular, participants noted the significant resources that are needed to meet the many initial settlement needs of newcomers (e.g., housing, legal, employment). Often churches themselves do not have the necessary financial resources to meet these needs, particularly if they encounter a high number of recent immigrants.

“There are all of the practical needs that have to get taken care of first and it is one of the challenges because integration can only happen after other needs like food are taken care of.” (Focus Group Participant)

The lack of resource capacity was seen to be much more pronounced among ethno-specific immigrant congregations. Members of these churches were often seen to struggle with their own settlement in Canada. This hindered them from being able to contribute their own time and money in the help of others. The result is that ethno-specific immigrant congregations often lacked resources to reach out to and engage other newcomers as they would like.

“My church is basically a new immigrant church. As a member of the immigrant church you become too busy establishing your own life here in Canada that you don’t have time to engage in the ministry.” (Focus Group Participant)

## Montreal Spotlight

### Montreal City Mission (MCM)

For one hundred years MCM has been assisting new arrivals in Quebec, in particular refugee claimants. MCM is a community organization of the United Church of Canada. Their work is made possible through partnerships with ecumenical and inter-faith neighbours, grass-roots groups, government, corporations and academia. Linking with these community resources has helped MCM respond to the issues of poverty and social exclusion that refugees and immigrants often face.

For more information please visit:  
[www.montrealcitymission.org](http://www.montrealcitymission.org)

## 5. SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVING HOW CHURCHES RESPOND

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“The church needs to become the leader of welcoming, integrating and loving people.”  
(Focus Group Participant)

It is clear from the previous sections that urban churches have work to do in better responding to the immigrant reality in Canada. Some research participants even suggested that churches were lagging behind other sectors of our society when in fact they should be leading the way.

Research participants gave many suggestions for improving church responsiveness. In general, their suggestions called on churches to move beyond the initial welcome and to make more intentional efforts in reaching out to and more fully including recent immigrants within church life. Below we outline the main suggestions as made by research participants. (A number of forum participants noted the limitation of the study in not considering how these or other

strategies related to diversity more generally, particularly in relation to Canada’s Aboriginal peoples.)

We organized the suggestions in three main categories: vision, structure and process. Taken together these suggestions acknowledge that local congregations are embedded in a larger context or system (Janzen, 2010). To be effective, change is therefore needed at multiple levels: within and among local congregations, within and across denominations or other kinds of Christian networks, or in the form of partnerships between churches and para-church or other organizations. Also underlying these suggestions is the assumption that change is a matter of faith – of needing to be carried out in obedience to the leading of the Spirit of God (Van Gelder, 2008).

### 5.1 PROMOTE A VISION FOR CHANGE

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“All is based on the vision of church. You can come up with any structure, but if there is no vision, you are not going to get it.”  
(Local Key Informant)

The need for vision is often not foregrounded by those who describe procedures for systemic change (e.g., Kelly, Ryan, Altman, & Stelzner, 2000). Participants of our study, however, clearly spoke of the need for vision as a forerunner to guide the implementation of new structures and new processes. More specifically, they spoke of a vision that promotes a church in which immigrants not only passively belong, but are an integral part of church to the extent that they change the very character of churches in Canada.

Vision was seen to be important because it provided direction and inspiration to renew Canadian urban churches in light of their

ever-increasing multicultural communities. It was leaders who held the primary responsibility to cast vision. Their visions should articulate underlying principles to govern church behaviour, and identify resources needed to bring about desired change. Such vision casting was seen to be important as it would move churches beyond a superficial and shallow response to the present immigrant reality (as many claimed was now the case). In order for change to be lasting and deep, existing attitudes, values and beliefs needed to be challenged to such an extent that represented a fundamental shift in church norms.

The following sub-sections provide the vision-related suggestions of study participants. We organized these suggestions into four categories. These categories can be seen to represent the hallmarks of church

congregations, denominations and interdenominational efforts that take seriously the need to better respond to their recent immigrant neighbours.

#### A VISION IN WHICH... A RESPONSE TO RECENT IMMIGRANTS IS INTENTIONAL

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One key dimension of a vision is intentionality. Churches should make *deliberate* efforts in welcoming and in integrating immigrants into church life. It was not that participants were suggesting elaborate plans of action (that in the end could disappoint and disillusion people if not reached). But an intentional vision would simply encourage churches to take the needed next step in deepening their response to recent immigrants. Examples of concrete expressions of intentionality as identified by study participants included:

- highlighting immigration issues within the church
- sharing stories that explore cultural issues
- involving immigrants “up front” during Sunday worship services
- repenting of racist tendencies
- broadening the involvement of those supporting immigrants
- encouraging immigrants to support other immigrants

Most often the suggestion for intentionality was directed at church leaders. “I think leaders need to be alerted of the growing reality [of immigrants] in our city,” said one survey respondent, “and [then] re-orient the goals of the church to actually consider responding to recent immigrants more intentionally.” More than simply wanting recent immigrants to be “in the church community”, intentionality is cultivated by church leaders who stress that immigrants should also be “of the community” Welcoming and integrating immigrants therefore becomes part of the church’s culture and mission. Leaders provide teaching and preaching on why and how this happens, and create spaces for constructive dialogue that fosters mutual learning and growing (Law, 1996; Yancey, 2003).

“Nothing will occur unless the local church is committed to intentionally develop synergistic relationship with believers from other cultural contexts. This interaction needs to be intentionally developed because only an intentional investment will succeed. People gravitate away from the discomfort of intercultural relationships unless the will and vision is there to design and implement an agenda.” (Naylor, 2009 p. 17)

At the congregational level, the need for intentionality was seen to be applicable to any of the three general cultural models of church identified by our research. First is the mono-cultural congregation model which has as its vision is to serve and integrate people of a similar cultural background. A second model is the intercultural congregation seeking to integrate people from diverse cultural backgrounds. The vision here is to counter exclusion and to create a sense of belonging and attachment among culturally diverse people. The third is a hybrid model in which, one or two dominant cultures that seek to include people from multiple other cultural backgrounds in any variety of formats (e.g., as sister congregations, as satellite congregations, as single congregations), but in which the dominant culture(s) still dictates how the church is structured and how it operates.

Regardless of the congregational model, leaders can be intentional in casting a vision of why and how to respond to recent immigrants. One key informant in our study has written elsewhere of the benefits and challenges of each cultural model, and how intentionality is concretely expressed differently within each model (see Naylor, 2007).

Beyond individual congregations, intentionality was also seen to be important denominationally and inter-denominationally. In particular, participants pointed out the importance of churches intentionally working

with other congregations and organizations within their local communities, whether at a city or a neighbourhood level.

#### A VISION IN WHICH... PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS WITH RECENT IMMIGRANTS ARE VALUED

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According to study participants, vision should also emphasize the importance of building personal relationships with recent immigrants. Informal personal relationships were seen to be much more important for immigrant integration than developing formal programs. Given their prior church experience, many recent immigrants look not only for familiar worship; they also seek out fellowship and a sense of community. Vision, therefore, should emphasize the importance of building relationships and encouraging members to take personal interest in others.

“Show a genuine interest in people. People love to talk about themselves...it’s not a matter of race or culture; it’s just a matter of showing interest.” (Focus Group participant)

“It’s not sufficient to be a welcoming church. Most are welcoming, but you’ve got to go out of your way, you have to build relationships.” (Local Key Informant)

It was pointed out that visionary leaders should set the example by going out and making friendships with recent immigrants. “Leadership should live by example [in building relationships]” suggested a local key informant.

“If the leaders and pastors are not modeling this – it is not really in their heart – it is probably not going to happen [immigrant integration]. Once it is in their heart, and they make friends with immigrants and refugees, it will happen.” (Focus Group Participant)

We will discuss concrete mechanisms to build personal relationships with recent immigrants in the sections below.

#### A VISION IN WHICH...THE GIFTS OF RECENT IMMIGRANTS ARE RECOGNIZED

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“Everything is relational; ours with God and then with each other. If I trust you, I will listen to what you say.” (Focus Group Participant)

“I taught a lot about God’s love for the nations, a love for languages, and how this makes such a wonderful mosaic. These are all helpful. But nothing compares with simply having a relationship with newcomers.” (Focus Group Participant)

A vision should be created that recognizes and values the spiritual giftedness of recent immigrants and how these gifts could contribute to and enrich churches in Canada. A number of recent immigrants come to Canada with considerable church experience and leadership skills. They also bring global theologies that broaden a North American-only theological viewpoint. Visionary leadership would work to create opportunities where these “Diaspora leaders” can begin using their skills and experience.

“A lot of immigrants that come are already experienced and they can begin using their gifts immediately. They don’t need to necessarily go to 4 years of Bible school. Everyone can be involved in church life.” (Focus Group Participant)

In addition, research participants indicated the need to educate church members about the contribution of immigrants to their church, even showcasing examples of churches that recognized immigrants’ gifts and talents. As previously mentioned, survey respondents who had begun to actively include recent immigrants within their congregation noted the many benefits, including bringing richness, freshness and new life to their congregations.

“Receiving newcomers is refreshing; it’s like a fresh breath, the new people bring new perspectives, joy.” (Focus Group Participant)



## A VISION IN WHICH...CULTURAL DIVERSITY IS CELEBRATED AND VALUED

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Canada is a multicultural society with people belonging to diverse cultures and speaking multiple languages. Study participants spoke of how a vision for churches responding to recent immigrants included celebrating and valuing this cultural diversity.

Celebrating cultural diversity could be achieved through any number of activities and events which serve to encourage cross cultural listening and understanding (see structure section). But visionary leadership would also explain why such a celebration was important from a Biblical perspective. One key informant theologically explained the importance of celebrating diversity in this way:

“Recognize theological spiritual mandate. We have to start from Biblical mandate-go to all nations. If the church starts from there, it’s a good starting point.” (National Key Informant)

However, a vision should go beyond the celebration of diverse cultures. The vision should also promote the value of other cultures, and in the process encourage church members to reflect on and adapt ideas and practices from the different cultural groups around them. Such a vision implies that no culture is superior in itself. It also recognizes that the onus for change is shared between both newcomer and host. Not only is the newcomer navigating differing cultures, choosing what cultural norms to adopt and what to discard. So too are host Canadians.

## 5.2 CREATE STRUCTURES THAT SUPPORT CHANGE

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“Without structure, it [responding to recent immigrants] really never gets off the ground. You need to focus on certain areas that you will work on.” (Focus Group Participant)

Study participants mentioned that churches in Canada need structures that would better facilitate a church response to recent immigrants. Structures would serve to

“The inclusive leader sees difference as an asset to the faith community. These leaders have developed a vision of the multicultural congregation that essentially establishes a new norm for the nature of the church in the multi-ethnic urban environment...The multicultural vision is articulated and demonstrated at all levels of the congregational life, both public and communal. Power has been redistributed in a manner that allows all cultural groups to have a sense of ownership in congregational life.” (Sheffield, 2005 pp. 95-96)

As a result, a vision prepares church members that their attitudes, values and behaviours may be stretched or changed in the process (Foster, 1998; Ionita, 1997, Sheffield, 2005).

“We are still fairly ethno-centric. The desire is there [to integrate immigrants] but sometimes it seems like we still want newcomers to be like us.” (Survey Respondent)

It is not surprising, then, that for some study participants valuing cultural diversity was an issue of equity and of power sharing. Diverse cultures were truly valued when culturally diverse church members each had the opportunity to influence each other in a reciprocal way. Celebrating and valuing cultural diversity in this way was seen as a helpful asset in combating racism and negative stereotypes.

improve interactions among people and resources towards this goal. In general they do this by creating new settings, activities or procedures that better equip churches to make desired changes. This includes determining how decisions should be made, who is to be included, and how resources should be allocated (Kelly, Ryan, Altman, & Stelzner, 2000).

The following sub-sections provide the suggestions made by study participants as to how churches can adopt more supportive structures. Again these structural suggestions are applicable to the local congregation, denominational or interdenominational levels.

#### STRUCTURES THAT.... FACILITATE A RANGE OF MINISTRY OPTIONS

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Our study findings were clear: church structures should be expanded in recognition of the range of ministry options that recent immigrants require.

While churches were most likely to engage in ministry to meet the *immediate settlement needs* of immigrants, there are many other options that could be pursued. Using Unruh and Sider's (2004) typology of church ministry our survey found that church congregations were much less likely to engage in ministry types such as: *personal development programs* specifically for recent immigrants that seek to empower them to improve their physical, emotional, linguistic or social status (English language programs being a notable exception that churches more frequently offered), *community development programs* that seek to renew the building blocks of a healthy, inclusive community (e.g., jobs, health care), *systemic change activities* that attempt to transform unjust political, economic, environmental or cultural systems, or *evangelistic activities* designed for recent immigrants. In addition congregations seldom *sponsored immigrants* to come to Canada, either under the refugee or family reunification class.

Study participants identified the need for a range of such ministry options. Together these ministries would offer more holistic supports that would touch all aspects of an immigrant's life. In particular, a number of participants called for the church to become more active in systemic change activities.

"I think that when people arrive as refugees, there is a lot more that the church can do.

"We need to build some more connections with agencies that serve recent immigrants so that we can continue to encourage our members to interact with these agencies." (Survey Respondent)

"[We need] to be more integrated within the community network-- churches, community centres and the city social workers--to use our strengths together." (Survey Respondent)

[For example], they can advocate for better immigration policies." (National Key Informant)

"[Our church has] a greater desire to be involved in justice issues as we see the injustices in the lives of our new friends." (Survey Respondent)

It was not that study participants were suggesting that all local congregations needed to offer a complete range of ministry options. But together, congregations in a given city or denominations that spanned the country needed to become much more involved in ministry to recent immigrants. In part, this required the church to adopt an outreach mindset – of going out of their comfort zone and into the community instead of waiting for recent immigrants to come to through the church door. Urban churches were encouraged to reach out to immigrants in all kinds of housing, including in high rise apartments and to people of all generations. Such outreach would make churches more aware of their ministry opportunities.

Participants noted that congregations did not need to act alone in building ministry structures. In fact they called on churches to develop new or stronger partnerships with other churches or para-church organizations, immigrant-serving organizations and the government. Collaborative ministry structures enabled groups to efficiently share their

resources, whether financial, experiential or human resources. In particular study participants called on churches to encourage volunteer involvement in their ministry to immigrants.

Finally, research participants called on churches to do a better job of sharing information about available ministries and programs for recent immigrants. In part, this suggestion was for the sake of recent immigrants who needed to become aware of existing supports in their community or how they could become involved in a local church. In part this suggestion was for the sake of other local churches and groups supporting immigrants, in an effort to share resources, to inspire new ministry ideas, and to avoid duplication. Using church websites, making information available at local community agencies frequented by immigrants, and attending local immigrant network meetings were concrete ways in which churches could help facilitate awareness about local programs and supports.

“Dissemination of information is critical because some churches who want to do something but really don’t know who to talk to, who can help. This becomes a critical part in churches effectively welcoming immigrants.” (Local Key Informant)

“Greater connection and sharing of resources with other churches who have navigated these issues already [is needed].” (Survey Respondent)

### STRUCTURES THAT... FACILITATE MULTICULTURAL INTERACTION

Churches should create structures that facilitate and promote intermingling of recent immigrants and other church members. Structures should be designed to increase the interaction among different cultures. Study participants believed that such interaction would lead to a better understanding of each others’ perspectives, to provide better opportunities to develop and deepen relationships, and to improve ministry.

“We need to give new immigrants opportunities to express their culture. For example, integrate in the hymns some segments in the language of origin of newcomers. Allow newcomers to express their customs and integrating them in some of the special events – Easter, Christmas.” (Local Key Informant)

“Deliberately create space for different groups to be able to do specific things that are outside of the mainline activities of the church to let people show off their gifts and practices in a way that is fulfilling for the congregation and for the individual.” (Focus Group Participant)

We heard many ideas of how this interaction could be facilitated. Some suggestions had an emphasis on social support and relationship-building. Examples included organizing social, recreational and friendship events for church members, often involving food (“Food has no language barrier and everyone is always willing to fellowship over a meal,” was how one survey respondent put it). Other examples included placing recent immigrants within smaller gatherings of church members who meet regularly for support, prayer and study. Finally participants also suggested to intentionally matching recent immigrants with other people in the church, either on the basis of shared affinity (e.g., culture, language or common interest), or as a part of a “host family program”.

Another group of suggestions emphasized cross-cultural learning among church members. Examples included holding cultural celebrations and festivals, multicultural music events and other expressions of informally sharing elements of culture among church members.

“Carry out ethnic and multicultural activities (parties, celebrations, music, and seminars)

for creating awareness and interest on this topic to the whole congregation.” (Focus Group Participant)

Study participants also suggested that multicultural interaction could be enhanced within the rituals of church. Most frequent was the suggestion to provide opportunities to incorporate different multicultural aspects into Sunday worship services. These suggestions resonated with the bulk of literature on intercultural churches that focus on promoting multicultural worship (see appendix for examples). But our study participants went further. They also suggested that new and creative structures needed to be developed outside traditional worship rituals.

Finally, there were suggestions to facilitate multicultural interaction among leaders of ethno-specific immigrant churches and other Canadian churches. For example, clergy of churches with relatively few immigrants could be paired with recent immigrant clergy. Such mentorship pairings would promote cross-cultural understanding and potential ministry partnerships. In addition, a “leadership exchange” program could be developed that would build the capacity of both the ethno-specific and Canadian-born church leaders to lead in multicultural contexts. It was suggested that an umbrella organization or a network could assume the responsibility of developing such an exchange. A final suggestion was for denominations to explore how to adapt their structures in an effort to better integrate ethno-specific immigrant congregations into denominational life.

#### STRUCTURES THAT... FACILITATE COMMUNICATION

A final suggestion was to create structures that better facilitated communication between recent immigrants and other church members. Communication involved two dimensions: overcoming language barriers and promoting cross cultural dialogue.

Regarding language barriers, study

participants noted that churches should create structures that recognized and respected the different languages within their community. These structures would serve to create a greater sense of belonging among members of different cultural groups. For example, churches could allocate resources to continue supporting programs (e.g. ESL/FSL) that build the language capacity of recent immigrants. Churches could also provide recent immigrants with opportunities to actively participate in church rituals using their native language (e.g., corporate prayer, worship songs). In addition, churches could make accommodations for languages by providing interpretation for worship services and programs, and by translating church promotional and educational material in the main immigrant languages served by the church. Finally, recruiting church staff who speak multiple languages could help overcome language barriers, especially for older generation immigrants.

### Winnipeg Spotlight

#### City Church

City Church in Winnipeg takes intercultural communication seriously. The congregation of some 240 people worship together in several languages, with the teaching is shared between a Canadian born pastor and a pastor originated from Burma.

The church also offers a wide range of social services to immigrants through ‘City Connections’, a separate facility operated by the church. For more information please visit: <http://citychurchwinnipeg.org>

Study participants also highlighted the need for cross-cultural dialogue. In other words, spaces needed to be created that allowed members from different cultural backgrounds to safely and honestly speak about their cultural differences. These spaces would allow for constructive dialogue that leads to

mutual learning, growing and which challenges stereotypes (Law, 1996; Yancey, 2003). These spaces would allow members of different cultures to learn and understand each other's ways of expressing respect to others. These spaces would also help members to overcome the many challenges (even conflict) when people of diverse cultures live together in community.

"There is a need for more intercultural dialogues with a culturally sensitive facilitator who can lead people through and point out the differences and validate the

difference, and from there work together and make progress." (Local Key Informant)

Cross cultural dialogue could be extended beyond church members to include hearing perspectives from cultural community members not attending the church.

"Perhaps an outside facilitation could provide some guided dialogue between representatives of various ethnic groups and Canadians within our congregation to raise these challenges and suggestions for accommodation." (Survey Respondent)

### 5.3 DEVELOP PROCESSES THAT ENCOURAGE CHANGE

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"Humanize the process and make it easier for us to be the church." (Local Key Informant)

A third category of change identified was the need for processes that equip churches to better respond to recent immigrants. These processes would enable churches (whether local congregations, denominations or other inter-denominational partnerships) to better reach out to, better welcome and better integrate immigrants into church life.

Processes are the concrete actions that churches can take towards this end. Effective processes enable churches to change existing structures or to create ones. They also allow all members of the church to have an influence in shaping the nature and direction of the church. The following four sub-sections provide the main process suggestions of study participants.

#### PROCESSES THAT....FACILITATE TRAINING AND EDUCATION PROGRAMS

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Perhaps the most frequently mentioned of all suggestions was the need for training and education. Study participants repeatedly called for training and educational activities that would help facilitate a process of change. These activities would raise awareness and build the capacity of church members and leaders alike in navigating the challenges of

people from diverse cultures relating with each other.

There were many training topics that participants suggested. At a general level was the need for training that instilled a

### Toronto Spotlight

#### The Tyndale Intercultural Ministry Centre (TIM Centre)

The TIM Centre offers exposure to international mission leaders who offer academic and practical teaching related to missions. Some of the key trainings include:

-A 10 hour seminar called "The Missional Church: Becoming Intentionally Intercultural" develops intercultural competence for ministry in a multicultural context.

-A diploma in Leadership Training for Diaspora Leaders. This is an affordable and accessible 2 years training for immigrant leaders, leading to credentialing within partner denominations.

For more information please visit:

<http://www.tyndale.ca/tim>

greater awareness of the need for congregations and denominations to better respond to the immigrant reality. But participants also offered a more specific range of topics, including:

- Cross cultural awareness, competence and intelligence
- Overcoming language barriers
- The Canadian immigration system
- Cross cultural pastor care
- Legal immigration issues
- Connecting with people of other faiths
- Changing programs and structures from monoculture to intercultural
- Leadership models for diverse communities
- Building bridges with ethnic communities
- Doing multicultural outreach
- Theological underpinnings (e.g. Biblical imperative to offer hospitality, to welcome the stranger, to be a house of all nations)

A variety of tools and formats were suggested, including training classes and seminars, teaching and preaching within worship services (including pulpit sharing with immigrant ministers), written case studies of best practices, and mentoring or coaching opportunities. Target audiences included church members and ministry volunteers as well as church leaders, including training for immigrants to become leaders.

Study participants suggested that there was a need for written and visual education materials targeted specifically for Canadian churches. Books, newsletters, audio/video were suggested formats, as was an easy-to-follow 'toolkit' or information package. Such a toolkit would concretely guide churches in welcoming and in integrating recent immigrants (beyond Sunday morning worship service). There were also calls for materials to be published in multiple languages as a way of also benefitting ethno-specific immigrant churches.

"One of my observations is that there is no major guideline for churches in general. So

*"We need to see ourselves and our own understanding of God's future with the eyes of Christians from other cultures, listen to the voices of Christians from other cultures, so as to make sure that the voice of our culture has not drowned out the voice of Jesus Christ." (Volf, 1996 p. 54)*

the trend is that every church is really fighting to solve this problem on its own."  
(Focus Group Participant)

Finally, participants also called for better awareness of existing educational and training resources, including resources from denominational bodies. Our own literature review identified a number of written resources that are presently available. Many of these are based on the experience of churches in the United States, and typically have a racial focus. Some, however, are based on the experience of Canadian churches, written by Canadian church leaders and emphasize a multicultural focus (e.g., Brynjolfson & Lewis, 2004; Naylor, 2007; Ng, 2004; Seim, 1999; Sheffield, 2005; United Church of Canada, 2007).

#### PROCESSES THAT....GIVE VOICE AND LEADERSHIP TO RECENT IMMIGRANTS

Processes that enable recent immigrants to have a greater say over church matters were encouraged by study participants. To begin, churches could designate a person or position within the congregation whose role includes encouraging others to be more responsive to immigrants or cultural diversity. Such a position could also be responsible to identify, prevent, and resolve cross-cultural conflicts or complaints. One church described how they had implemented this idea with a team format:

"Create a team that works with newcomers. We call them the cross-cultural team -- leaders and members working together."  
(Focus Group Participant)

Other participants suggested that churches go deeper and actively work against the systemic barriers that recent immigrant church leaders too often face in ministering in Canadian churches. There was a call for churches to involve recent immigrants within church leadership positions at all levels. “Promote immigrant leadership now!” is how one local key informant outlined the urgency of the situation. Others suggested that congregations and denominations should identify recent immigrants who have previously been church leaders and provide them similar opportunities to ministry in Canada. Canadian churches could benefit from their giftedness. What is more, their first-hand experience of being an immigrant would help them to better understand the needs of newcomers and help to make outreach efforts more effective.

“Let the newcomer leaders be part of the church. Let their voices be heard. Let them speak and share their abilities.” (Focus Group Participant)

#### PROCESSES THAT... ENSURE ADEQUATE PLANNING

Adequate planning strategies were considered vital for churches to be more responsive to the immigrant reality. Planning would ensure that activities intended to engage recent immigrants were most appropriate and that resources would be best allocated. Aspects of planning at the congregational and denominational levels could include:

- Conducting needs and resource assessments in order to accurately plan and implement programs and ministries that respond to the needs of recent immigrants
- Involving recent immigrants in the planning of worship times and in other church ministries
- Nurturing and seeking out partnerships with other local groups or agencies who serve recent immigrants in an effort to avoid duplicate and create synergies.

- Drawing on the resources of external groups (e.g., interdenominational bodies, international partnerships) that provide advice about how to reach out to and integrate recent immigrants.

### Hamilton Spotlight

#### TrueCity: Churches together for the good of the city

The TrueCity is a movement of six core urban churches in the Hamilton area. Together, these congregations ensure effective planning to engage neighbourhoods. They also partner in training leaders and forming disciples who together explore ways of engaging communities with the Gospel.

For more information visit: [www.truecity.ca](http://www.truecity.ca)

### Vancouver Spotlight

#### Coalition of Refugee-Assisted Ministries (CORAM)

Formerly known as Vancouver’s Lower Mainland Refugee Highway Partnership, CORAM has over 50 partners. These include non profit organizations, community development initiatives, refugee sponsoring churches, shelters and interested individuals who cooperate under CORAM umbrella. For more information visit: [www.coramnetwork.ca](http://www.coramnetwork.ca)

Study participants noted that implementing these planning strategies would ensure that church ministries and programs would make sense to recent immigrants. After all, good planning would help congregations design programs and ministries that responded to actual needs of immigrants.

The need for partnerships was particularly emphasized. In part this was a denominational responsibility, with denominational leaders creating opportunities for churches to jointly plan a collective strategy to better respond to recent immigrants. In part the call for partnerships in planning was also a congregational responsibility. Local congregations should not work in isolation. Rather they should network and build partnerships in an effort to learn from each other. This collaborative planning would also help in identifying available resources and in making efficient use of these resources.

“I think churches need to learn to be open, to learn from one another. Churches need to sometimes work together. ‘Tell me your experience; tell me what you do with immigrants, with newcomers, because it is important.’” (Focus Group Participant)

Partnerships in planning also included close relationships and networking among ethno-specific immigrant churches and other Canadian churches. “We need to create bridges with churches of different nationalities”, remarked one focus group participant. Creating these planning bridges would be mutually beneficial. Ethno-specific immigrant churches would potentially gain by developing future collaborative ministry that would address their resource-based challenges. Other Canadian churches could learn about effective outreaching efforts and relationship building strategies.

Finally, study participants also emphasized the need to share planning experiences and resources. In particular, church leaders were interested in knowing about promising practices from other congregations (in particular from ethno-specific immigrant congregations) or from other denominations. They could then adapt these learnings to their local context.

Some participants even suggested doing a comparison with other religions such as Muslims and Sikhs in order to find out strategies that they use in reaching out to and

integrating recent immigrants.

### PROCESSES THAT...ENCOURAGE REFLECTION AND EVALUATION

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A final process suggestion was less common but still noteworthy. Suggestions were made for churches to reflect on and evaluate their progress in responding to recent immigrants.

Ongoing reflection and evaluation could take a variety of expressions. It could include formal evaluations of congregational ministries, of denominational programs, or of programs carried out in collaboration with other church or community partners. These evaluations should find out what activities and structures were most helpful in welcoming and integrating recent immigrants. Evaluations could explore how churches could best respond to concerns raised by recent immigrants within the church. Denominations could provide capacity-building opportunities on how to conduct program evaluation. Formal assessments enable churches to continually learn from and improve on their efforts. Such reflection could also aid congregations in marking their progress along the continuum of seeing racial and cultural differences as deficits to valuing these differences.<sup>3</sup>

But reflection and evaluation could also be carried out at the individual level. Study participants noted how important it was to encourage members to be self-reflective of their own cultural biases that could impact their relationships with recent immigrants. In the words of one survey respondent:

“The biggest challenge is not recognizing our own cultural assumptions and how they impact on us.” (Survey respondent)

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<sup>3</sup> See Sheffield (2005) for a more detailed discussion of his six stages of church multicultural development: the excluding church, the club church, the open church, the awakening church, the redefining church and the transformed church.



**APPENDICES**

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## NATIONAL AND LOCAL KEY INFORMANTS

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- Dan Sheffield (The Free Methodist Church in Canada--Hamilton)
- Noreen Nimrod (Long time immigrant settlement worker and trainer--Toronto)
- Dr. Sam Owusa (Calvary Worship Centre--New Westminster)
- Glenn Smith (Christian Direction--Montreal)
- Moses Moini (Mennonite Central Committee--Kitchener-Waterloo)
- Alison Witt (TrueCity--Hamilton)
- Mark Knetsch (Immanuel Christian Reformed Church--Hamilton)
- Scott Jones (Micah House--Hamilton)
- Mary Jo Leddy (Romero House--Toronto)
- John-Peter Smit (Congregational Development Consultant--Toronto)
- Alvin Nicholson (African Christian Canadian Network--Toronto)
- Jack Taylor (Faith Fellowship Baptist--Vancouver)
- Mark Naylor (North West Baptist Seminary--Vancouver)
- Sonny Mandagie (House for All Nations International Church--Vancouver)
- Jose Da Silva (Christian Direction--Montreal)
- Joseph Friedland (Evangel Pentecostal Church--Montreal)
- Richard Platt (Christian Direction--Montreal)
- Norm Voth, (Mennonite Church Manitoba--Winnipeg)
- Pastor Fred Sebastian (Church of the Living Hope--Winnipeg)
- Tim Nielson (City Church--Winnipeg)

**Key Informant Interview Protocol (national)**

**Introduction**

- How have you been involved on the topic of welcoming and integrating immigrants into the life of Canadian churches?
- What major trends have you observed over the years on this topic?

**Understanding the immigrant church experience**

- In general, how do recent immigrants experience church in Canada?
  - To what extent and in what ways are immigrants involved in Canadian churches?
  - How are immigrants engaged in mission and service both to their own ethnic community and in cross cultural settings?
  - To what extent are immigrant gifts being acknowledged and used within Canadian churches?
  - What unique understandings of church do immigrants bring (e.g. leadership, ministry, structure, inclusion, worship, etc)?

**Understanding the Canadian church response**

- In general, what has been the response of churches in Canada to recent immigrants?
  - What are their attitudes and perceptions toward recent immigrants?
  - To what extent are Canadian churches aware of recent immigrant experiences and perspectives?
  - How do opinions about church (e.g. leadership, ministry, structure, inclusion, worship, etc) among Canadian church leaders compare with recent immigrant perspectives?
  - What efforts have Canadian churches made to welcome and include recent immigrants in the life of their church?
    - Promoting a vision for immigrant integration
    - Creating structures that facilitate immigrant integration
    - Implementing processes that facilitate immigrant integration
- What are the main successes of Canadian churches in welcoming and integrating immigrants into church life?
  - What are the factors that contributed to these successes?
- What are the main challenges that Canadian churches face in welcoming and integrating immigrants into church life?
  - What would help Canadian churches to overcome these challenges?

**Understanding future action**

- What are the strategies and structure that would best facilitate the active involvement of recent immigrants within Canadian churches?
  - What can churches do to be more welcoming and inclusive?
  - What role can immigrant church leaders play?
  - How can churches better support each other?
  - How can the interaction between Canadian and immigrant church leaders be enhanced?
- What can denomination leaders do to equip congregations to better welcome and integrate immigrants into church life?
- Is there anything that you would like to share about welcoming and integrating immigrants into church life?

## Key Informant Interview Protocol (local)

### Introduction

- How have you been involved on the topic of welcoming and integrating recent immigrants into the life of churches in the city?
- What major trends have you observed over the years on this topic in the city?

### Understanding the recent immigrant church experience

- In general, how do recent immigrants experience church in the city?
  - To what extent and in what ways are recent immigrants involved in church in the city?
  - To what extent are recent immigrant gifts being acknowledged and used within church in the city?
  - What unique understandings of church do recent immigrants bring (e.g. leadership, ministry, structure, inclusion, worship, etc)?

### Understanding the Canadian church response

- In general, what has been the response of churches in the city to recent immigrants?
  - What are their attitudes and perceptions toward recent immigrants?
  - To what extent are churches in the city aware of recent immigrant experiences and perspectives?
  - How do opinions about church (e.g. leadership, ministry, structure, inclusion, worship, etc) among church leaders in the city compare with recent immigrant perspectives?
  - What efforts have churches in the city made to welcome and include recent immigrants in the life of their church?
    - Promoting a vision for immigrant integration
    - Creating structures that facilitate immigrant integration
    - Implementing processes that facilitate immigrant integration
- What are the main successes of churches in the city in welcoming and integrating recent immigrants into church life?
  - What are the factors that contributed to these successes?
- What are the main challenges that churches in the city face in welcoming and integrating recent immigrants into church life?
  - What would help churches to overcome these challenges?

### Understanding future action

- What are the strategies and structure that would best facilitate the active involvement of recent immigrants within churches in the city?
  - What can churches in the city do to be more welcoming and inclusive?
  - What role can immigrant church leaders play?
  - How can churches in the city better support each other?
  - How can the interaction between Canadian and immigrant church leaders be enhanced?
- What can congregation leaders in the city do to equip congregations to better welcome and integrate recent immigrants into church life?
- Is there anything that you would like to share about welcoming and integrating recent immigrants into church life?

## Focus Group Interview Protocol

### Introduction

- How have you been involved on the topic of welcoming and integrating recent immigrants into the life of your congregation?
- What major trends have you observed over the years on this topic?

### Understanding the recent immigrant church experience

- Reflecting on the experience of recent immigrants in your congregation...
  - To what extent and in what ways are recent immigrants involved in your congregation?
  - To what extent are recent immigrant gifts being acknowledged and used within your congregation?
  - What unique understandings of church do recent immigrants bring (e.g. leadership, ministry, structure, inclusion, worship, etc)?

### Understanding the Canadian church response

- In general, what has been the response of your congregations to recent immigrants?
  - What are their attitudes and perceptions toward recent immigrants?
  - To what extent is your congregation aware of recent immigrant experiences and perspectives?
  - How do opinions about church (e.g. leadership, ministry, structure, inclusion, worship, etc) among your congregation leaders compare with recent immigrant perspectives?
  - What efforts has your congregation made to welcome and include recent immigrants in the life of their church?
    - Promoting a vision for recent immigrant integration
    - Creating structures that facilitate recent immigrant integration
    - Implementing processes that facilitate recent immigrant integration
- What are the main successes of your congregation in welcoming and integrating recent immigrants into church life?
  - What are the factors that contributed to these successes?
- What are the main challenges that your congregation face in welcoming and integrating recent immigrants into church life?
  - What would help your congregation to overcome these challenges?

### Understanding future action

- What are the strategies and structure that would best facilitate the active involvement of recent immigrants within your congregation?
  - What can your congregation do to be more welcoming and inclusive?
  - What role can recent immigrant church leaders play?
  - How can your congregation better support each other?
  - How can the interaction between Canadian and recent immigrant church leaders be enhanced?
- What can congregation leaders do to equip congregations to better welcome and integrate recent immigrants into church life?
- Is there anything that you would like to share about welcoming and integrating recent immigrants into church life?

## SURVEY QUESTIONS

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### A. Description of your church congregation

- With which denomination, if any, is your congregation affiliated?
- What year was your congregation established?
- In what urban area is your congregation located?
- In what language(s) are your worship services held (excluding interpretation)?
- How many pastoral staff/clergy serve within your congregation?
- How many pastoral staff/clergy are immigrants?
- What is your approximate average weekly church attendance, counting all worship services, in the past year?
- In what type of building(s) is your congregation located?

To the best of your knowledge:

- Approximately what percentage of your average weekly worship service attendees are immigrants (people born outside of Canada)?
- Approximately what percentage of your average weekly worship service attendees are recent immigrants (people who arrived in Canada during the last five years)?
- To what extent has the number of immigrants attending your worship service changed over past five years?
- In what world regions were immigrants born who attend your service(s)?

### B. Vision: To what extent leaders in your congregation encourage immigrant inclusion

-Please rate your congregation in the following areas over the **past two years**:  
(always/generally done; occasionally done; seldom/never done; don't know/not applicable)

Being intentional

- Our congregation's leaders stress that reaching out to and including immigrants is a part of our church culture and mission.
- Our congregation receives ongoing teaching and preaching about welcoming immigrants into our church life.
- Our congregation's leaders encourage dialogue between immigrants and Canadian-born in a way that leads to mutual learning and growing.

Recognizing benefits and opportunities

- Our congregation's leaders speak about the benefits that cultural diversity brings to our church congregation.
- Members of our congregation are encouraged to view ministry with immigrants as an opportunity to exercise their spiritual gifts.
- Our congregation's leaders stress that immigrants bring an opportunity for church health and growth that would otherwise not be available.

Promoting principles and values

- Members of our congregation are encouraged to welcome and include people around them regardless of their culture, language or race.
- Members of our congregation are encouraged to reflect on their own cultural norms and assumptions and how these are similar or different to those around them.
- Members of our congregation are encouraged to adapt ideas and practices from the different cultural groups around them.

- Our congregation's leaders raise awareness about the power and privilege of some racial groups over others.
- Our congregation's leaders promote anti-racism and actively work against the structured inequalities that immigrants experience.
- Our congregation's leaders stress that it is important for immigrants to be given opportunity to serve and lead within the church.
- Immigrants and Canadian-born are encouraged to work collaboratively with each other in our church ministries, and to do so in such a way that the responsibilities and benefits are mutually shared.

-Please provide examples that illustrate what your congregation has done regarding any of the questions above.

**C. Structure: How your congregation has structured itself to include immigrants within your church.**

-Please rate your congregation in the following areas over the **past two years**:  
(always/generally done; occasionally done; seldom/never done; don't know/not applicable)

Places and spaces

- We make space available within our church building for immigrant communities to meet among themselves
- We hold joint worship services with other congregations of different cultural backgrounds
- We hold other special events that encourage the intermingling of immigrants and Canadian-born

Ministry programs

- We provide settlement and relief services specifically for immigrants that meet their immediate basic needs (e.g., food, clothing, housing, legal).
- We provide personal development programs specifically for immigrants that seek to empower them to improve their physical, emotional, linguistic, relational or social status (e.g., ESL, visitation, recreation).
- We provide community development programs related to immigrants that seek to renew the building blocks of a healthy, inclusive community (e.g., jobs, health care).
- We pursue systemic change activities that attempt to transform unjust political, economic, environmental or cultural systems to the specific benefit of immigrants
- We hold evangelistic activities that are specifically targeted for immigrants.
- Our congregation sponsors immigrants to come to Canada, either under the refugee or family reunification class.
- We contribute financial or in-kind resources to other organizations or groups that serve immigrants or refugees.

Rituals

- We incorporate culturally diverse expressions in our worship and liturgy.
- We intentionally pray for and with immigrants and their families.
- We encourage and support immigrants toward membership within our church.

Language accommodations

- Worship services are conducted in the main immigrant languages served by our church.
- Interpretation is provided for worship services and programs/ministries in the main immigrant languages served by our church.
- Church promotional and educational material is translated in the main immigrant languages served by our church.

-Please provide examples that illustrate what your congregation has done regarding any of the

questions above.

**D. Processes: What your congregation is doing to better include immigrants within your church**

-Please rate your congregation in the following areas over the **past two years**:

(always/generally done; occasionally done; seldom/never done; don't know/not applicable)

Leading

- Efforts are made so that our congregation's leaders include members of the immigrant groups that we serve.
- There is a person or position within the church whose role includes encouraging others to be more responsive to immigrants or cultural diversity.
- Our congregation's leaders identify, prevent, and resolve cross-cultural conflicts or complaints.
- There is a distinct budget provision for activities that respond to immigrants.

Planning

- A needs assessment has been conducted to accurately plan and implement programs/ministries that respond to immigrants in our community.
- We involve immigrants in the planning of our worship services and other church ministries.
- We nurture and seek out partnerships with other local groups or agencies who serve immigrants.
- We draw on the resources of external groups (e.g., denominational bodies, international partnerships) that provide advice about how to welcome and integrate immigrants

Training

- Our church members and/or leaders receive ongoing training and support about the spiritual beliefs and traditions held by the immigrant groups that are apart of our congregation.
- Our church members and/or leaders receive ongoing training and support about how to deal with language barriers.
- Our church members and/or leaders receive ongoing training and support about how to encourage healthy cross cultural dialogue and mutual understanding.
- Our congregation's leaders receive ongoing training and support about cross cultural counselling and care.

Reflecting

- We regularly reflect on how well we are doing in welcoming and integrating immigrants.
- We make efforts to explore how best to respond to concerns raised by immigrants within the church.

-Please provide examples that illustrate what your congregation has done regarding any of the questions above.

**E. Your congregation's successes and challenges**

-People who recently came to Canada generally receive a warm welcome by members of our congregation. (strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree)

- People who recently came to Canada are generally integrated well into the life of our congregation. (strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree)

- What are your congregation's main successes in welcoming and including immigrants (if possible, give examples)?

-How has your congregation been impacted through ministry with immigrants? (if possible, give examples).

- What are the main challenges and gaps your congregation has encountered when trying to welcome immigrants? (if possible, give examples).



## **F. Future directions**

- What would help your congregation to better meet the challenges and gaps you mentioned in the previous question?

-What is one main lesson about welcoming and including immigrants that your congregation could share with other churches in Canada?

-Please add anything else that you would like to tell us about welcoming and including immigrants into church life.

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