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# Creating a World of Welcome

*On mission at home*

By Mark Chapman



Syrian refugees are in the news, but Canadian churches have been developing relationships with immigrants long before this current crisis. The recent needs of Syrian refugees and the ongoing diversification of Canadian society have brought concerns to the attention of churches across Canada.

A recent project in the Role of Churches in Immigrant Settlement and Integration study aims to help meet this need. The good news is that most churches already have the resources they need to make a difference.

Canadian churches are happy to have immigrants come to their churches, but they sometimes know little about how to help immigrants establish themselves in Canada or in the church.

The Role of Churches study identifies some factors that contribute to churches meeting this need. These include having a vision for working with immigrants, finding leaders, recognizing the ways churches respond, and the relational skills churches already have.

A church's intentional vision for working with immigrants contributes to their effectiveness. Intentionality starts in many different places, such as

- understanding the biblical mandate to serve the stranger and to be hospitable;
- a desire to grow and revitalize one's church;
- a shared experience of immigrating;
- awareness of changing demographics; and
- friendships with immigrants.

Vision rises out of the circumstances of each individual church and directs how each church allocates its time and resources.

To implement a vision, churches need people who step in to lead. Some are in paid positions, but most are lay people with a heart for newcomers.

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## 90+ Sources

The Role of Churches in Immigrant Settlement and Integration intends to better equip church groups across Canada to help immigrants and refugees settle and integrate into Canadian society.

The project focused on research; key informant interviews with eighteen national denominational, interdenominational, and nondenominational leaders; and a literature review of over ninety sources. Local partners conducted focus groups and congregational case studies in Vancouver, Toronto, Montreal, Halifax, Moncton, and Shediac, September 2013 to August 2014.



The website [canadianimmigrant.ca](http://canadianimmigrant.ca) has an entire section devoted to the variable Canadian climate. Anyone interested in understanding the immigrant family experience of winter should check it out.

## Research Reports



- Role of Churches in Immigrant Settlement and Integration research reports - [communitybasedresearch.ca/Page/View/Churches\\_and\\_Immigrants\\_Reports](http://communitybasedresearch.ca/Page/View/Churches_and_Immigrants_Reports)
- An interdenominational Guide to Action - [communitybasedresearch.ca/Page/View/Guide\\_to\\_Action](http://communitybasedresearch.ca/Page/View/Guide_to_Action)
- Welcoming Church research reports - [communitybasedresearch.ca/Page/View/Churches\\_Responding\\_to\\_the\\_Immig](http://communitybasedresearch.ca/Page/View/Churches_Responding_to_the_Immig)
- Beyond the Welcome resource toolkit - [communitybasedresearch.ca/resources/587/BTW\\_Resource\\_Toolkit.pdf](http://communitybasedresearch.ca/resources/587/BTW_Resource_Toolkit.pdf)
- UReach Toronto, connecting people to impact multicultural communities - [ureachtoronto.com](http://ureachtoronto.com)



On any given weekend, an estimated 300,000 people across Canada participate in the kind of church that draws 1,000 or more in weekly attendance. That's about 1 of 8 people who went to a Protestant church. Even in cities where sizable portions of the population check "no religion" on their household surveys, these predominantly evangelical congregations are growing, reaching out, and focused on serving children and youth.

## Leaving Egypt

"Some people would say that the Bible is a book of migrants... For example, Adam and Eve who were forced to migrate because of their disobedience and then their son was also forced to leave because of a crime that he committed, but there was also instruction from different people in the Bible to move - Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Mary and Joseph had to leave Egypt. All of our work is grounded on those stories and theological groundings, so that's the motivation to be faithful, to be faithful to do what is asked from us."

*Quote from the research*

Leadership needs to reflect the diversity of those who are being served, and those leaders need training in intercultural competence.

Churches are sometimes overwhelmed by what needs to be done. Few churches are equipped to walk immigrants through the details of settlement, and they don't have to be. Most churches focus on one particular area of need according to the gifting in their congregation.

Examples include English classes, services in the immigrants' languages, accompanying people to appointments, food banks, potluck dinners, pairing established families with immigrant families, and feeding international students.

Churches also form partnerships with other organizations (e.g., other churches, government agencies) that meet the needs that are beyond their capacity.

A common theme is relationships. This is a strength of churches. They meet a need rarely met by formal immigrant services.

Immigrants want people who care about them and who listen to them, people who will befriend them and have them into their homes for meals. Churches already know how to do this.

What can churches do to help immigrants settle and integrate into Canadian society? They can pay attention to the people around them, they can act according to their gifting, and they can love immigrants to the best of their ability.

A participant described working with newcomers as a way of "living life together," to create "a world of welcome." All Canadian churches have what they need to serve immigrants, they just need to invite all Canadian residents into living life together. •

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*This article is adapted from the research reports coming out of The Role of Churches in Immigrant Settlement and Integration project*



Check out Canada's Mosaic of Immigrant Communities at [the10and3.com/mapping-canadas-mosaic-of-immigrant-communities](http://the10and3.com/mapping-canadas-mosaic-of-immigrant-communities)

# Denominations' Current Resourcing of Immigrant and Refugee Ministry Areas

Denominations indicated to which of these ministry areas they allocated resources (via staffing, finances, and dedicated programs) at the national or regional level.

Source: National Survey Report

