

**Note:** This Work has been made available by the authority of the copyright owner solely for the purpose of private study and research and may not be copied or reproduced except as permitted by the copyright laws of Canada without the written authority from the copyright owner.

Chapman, Mark, James Watson, Andrea Chang & Nelson Chang. *Site Report: Toronto*. Kitchener, ON: Centre for Community Based Research, 2014. (The Role of Churches in Immigrant Settlement and Integration). <https://www.tyndale.ca/sites/default/files/2018-02/Toronto-Research-Report.pdf> (Accessed February 16, 2021)



# Site Report: Toronto

The Role of Churches in Immigrant Settlement and Integration

Mark Chapman, James Watson, Andrea Chang & Nelson Chang

November 2011

# SITE REPORT: TORONTO

The Role of Churches in Immigrant Settlement and Integration is a national research partnership intended to better equip church groups across Canada to help immigrants and refugees settle and integrate into Canadian society. This two-year project is funded by the **Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC)**.

Led by the Centre for Community Based Research (CCBR), the project has an interdenominational focus, with founding partners representing academics, denominational leaders, and interdenominational networks. More information about the project can be found at: [www.communitybasedresearch.ca/Page/View/PDG](http://www.communitybasedresearch.ca/Page/View/PDG)

Focus groups and case studies were held within the local study sites (Vancouver, **Toronto**, Montreal, Halifax, Moncton and Shediac). Other methods included a literature review, a national survey, and national key informant interviews.

## Research Partnership

Rich Janzen	<i>Centre for Community Based Research</i>
Joanna Ochocka	<i>Centre for Community Based Research</i>
Mark Chapman	<i>Tyndale University College &amp; Seminary</i>
James Watson	<i>The Salvation Army</i>
Sam Reimer	<i>Crandall University</i>
Michael Wilkinson	<i>Trinity Western University</i>
Glenn Smith	<i>Christian Direction</i>
Frédéric Dejean	<i>Université de Montréal</i>
Lorne Hunter	<i>Outreach Canada</i>
Rick Hiemstra	<i>Evangelical Fellowship of Canada</i>
Peter Noteboom	<i>Canadian Council of Churches</i>
Steve Kabetu	<i>Christian Reformed World Missions</i>

## Site Team – Toronto

Mark Chapman	<i>Tyndale University College &amp; Seminary</i>
James Watson	<i>The Salvation Army</i>
Andrea Chang	<i>Tyndale Intercultural Ministry (TIM) Centre</i>
Nelson Chang	<i>Tyndale Intercultural Ministry (TIM) Centre</i>
Steven Jung	<i>Tyndale Intercultural Ministry (TIM) Centre</i>
Ivana Mendez Piscione	<i>Tyndale Intercultural Ministry (TIM) Centre</i>
Carmen Wong	<i>Tyndale Intercultural Ministry (TIM) Centre</i>
Robert Cousins	<i>Tyndale Intercultural Ministry (TIM) Centre</i>

Centre for Community Based Research (CCBR)  
73 King Street West, Suite 300  
Kitchener, Ontario N2G 1A7  
Phone: (519) 741-1318 Fax: (519) 741-8262  
E-mail: [rich@communitybasedresearch.ca](mailto:rich@communitybasedresearch.ca)  
Website: [www.communitybasedresearch.ca](http://www.communitybasedresearch.ca)



CENTRE FOR  
COMMUNITY  
BASED RESEARCH

## Contents

Section 1 - Focus Groups.....	5
Introduction.....	5
Context.....	5
Method.....	6
Vision.....	6
Shared experience of immigration.....	6
Religious Motivation.....	7
Response to need.....	8
Summary.....	8
Structure.....	8
Informal Structures: Friendship.....	9
Formal Structures.....	10
Resources.....	12
Summary.....	14
Processes.....	14
Limited actions taking place.....	14
Leadership.....	15
Movement in the right direction.....	16
Summary.....	16
Discussion and Conclusions.....	16
Diversity of Experiences.....	17
Perceptions.....	17
Conclusions.....	17
Section 2 - Case Study One: Peoples Church.....	19
Introduction.....	19
Peoples Church.....	19
Background.....	19
The Newcomers Network (and other Immigrant Support).....	20
Method.....	21
Findings.....	22
Vision.....	22

# SITE REPORT: TORONTO

- Structure (including Training and Relationships) .....23
- Process .....26
- Concerns .....27
- Summary .....29
- Section 3 - Case Study Two ..... 30
  - Introduction.....30
  - Vision.....30
  - Structure.....32
  - Process .....34
  - Concerns.....34
  - Summary .....35
- References ..... 37

## Section 1 - Focus Groups

### INTRODUCTION

More than 70% of Toronto residents were either born in a different country, or have at least one parent who is foreign-born (Heisz 2006). Of all immigrants in Canada, more than one in three lived in Toronto in 2006 (Siemiatycki 2011). As a result Toronto has developed a large number of services to help immigrants settle and integrate into Canadian society. Christian congregations relate to these individuals and families (Janzen, Chapman and Watson 2012) and may provide assistance to immigrants (Ley 2008). This section reports on five focus groups composed of participants in Christian churches in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) who are involved in immigrant settlement and integration.

What we discovered was much conversation about structure. Participants provided a large amount of detail about what is being done and how it is being done. They also engaged in some conversation about their motivation for engaging newcomers—what we call vision in this project. However, there was less conversation focused around the process of integrating newcomers into the structures set out to serve them. Vision and process were mentioned less than 1/3 as much as structure; this despite the explicit efforts of focus group facilitators to prompt additional conversation in those areas.

In this report we provide the details of how different churches in the Greater Toronto Area perceive their involvement in the work of helping newcomers settle and integrate into Canada under the categories of Vision, Structure and Process. We incorporate discussion of some of the concerns related to assisting newcomers that were raised by participants into each section.

### CONTEXT

This discussion is based on five focus groups conducted between February 18 and June 3, 2014. These data are not intended to be representative of churches in the GTA. Rather, they serve as a rich snapshot of some of the activities taking place and how these activities are chosen and given meaning. However, focus group participants were chosen to reflect some of the diversity represented in the GTA. Thus, GTA focus groups included a total of 20 different individuals, from 11 different denominations, representing 10 different countries of origin. Nine of our participants were women and 11 were men. There was little commonality between the participants in any one focus group. There was sometimes more similarity among people across focus groups than within. As such we have chosen to report on all the focus groups in a single document.

In this report we use the term “newcomer” to describe individuals who have arrived in Canada recently. We use this term to distinguish encompass three distinct groups in our data: immigrants, refugees, and students. However, our participants did not always distinguish who they were referring to when they referenced “newcomers” and sometimes used the term “immigrants” to refer to all three groups.

# SITE REPORT: TORONTO

## METHOD

Each of the focus groups was run by a facilitator who asked the questions and guided the conversation and by two to four research team members who set up the facility, welcomed participants and participated in the discussion as relevant. Each conversation was recorded and a research team member took ethnographic notes. Recordings were transcribed and then coded by two different research team members. Other research team members reviewed and revised the codes. Code categories were reviewed, summarized, and interpreted based on the research categories of vision, structure and process. This resulted in 37 different codes in 12 categories. Interpretations were based on themes that crossed focus group boundaries. Subsequently, research team members reviewed the data and the interpretation to assure that the conclusions were valid.

The remainder of this report discusses these interpretations and explores what they mean for church's efforts to help newcomers settle and integrate.

## VISION

After some introductions at each focus group we started by exploring the vision each church had for engaging newcomers. This project defines vision as “the articulation of values, attitudes, and beliefs that provide direction for how churches can better support immigrant settlement and integration.” However, for the purposes of the focus group we asked, why have your churches decided to work with immigrants and refugees? What was the rationale? And who is driving this vision?

Sometimes participants acknowledged that there was little attention explicitly paid to the vision for what they were doing. Others noted that they had just started but had only a limited strategy in the past. Yet other churches or leaders of churches intentionally set out to develop a multicultural or intercultural ministry. Some had ongoing and longstanding experience relating to recent immigrants and were continuing to develop their approach and programs. We identified three specific reasons or visions for newcomer work: shared experience of immigration, religious motivation, and response to need.

### **Shared experience of immigration**

Twelve of our 20 participants had some personal familiarity with immigration (either themselves or their parents). Several of the churches involved in the study specifically self-identified as immigrant churches. A Russian Mennonite background participant explained that their community “having had that direct experience with being the stranger in a land we take Christ’s messages of welcoming that stranger very seriously.” While not an experience of immigration there was also one individual who pointed to an international experience as the source of their interest in this kind of work. Thus, values, attitudes and beliefs around supporting newcomers were often rooted in personal experience as a newcomer or the experience of a fellow church member. As will be made evident, it was these same churches that had means of involving newcomers in the process of integration and settlement because the demographics of the church ensured this.

# SITE REPORT: TORONTO

## Religious motivation

The second most common source of a vision for work with newcomers was a religious motivation. This could be their understanding of the existence of a biblical mandate to care for newcomers, or an emphasis on evangelism and spiritual conversations, or general concern for the spiritual well-being of individuals.

This concern manifests in different ways. Sometimes it is specifically connected to an evangelistic activity such as telling people about “the gospel” or a “get them to church” approach. However, there were also participants who shared a general concern for the spiritual well-being of newcomers but were concerned that their work with newcomers not have any hidden agendas. Several individuals emphasized the need to be explicit about the objective of particular events or meetings. This motivation was typically closely connected to provision of service and/or portraying a personal lifestyle that is intended to be a lived out expression of faith that people hope will point to God. This could be expressed as modeling how Jesus lived or described as the work of the Holy Spirit. For example, one participant noted that Jesus claimed to transcend all cultures and another observed that the biblical text appears to note more times when Jesus was sharing meals with people than when he was preaching.

That said, there was emphasis on bringing up God in conversation—although some people preferred to wait until the newcomer brought it up. Several participants talked about evangelism being a goal using language like, tell people about Jesus. Presumably, since all the people we talked to were doing this work in a church associated building or in the name of a church, newcomers would not be surprised when religion came up in conversation. However, in the absence of conversations with the newcomers themselves we cannot be sure of this or how this explicit religious motivation was received. One participant noted that they were encountering immigrants from both secular and religious societies who were either curious about religion or had come from a society where religion was a common topic of regular conversation:

We talk about religion openly. Especially, again, because a lot of our students, a lot of our students fall into two categories: they come from a completely irreligious country like Japan or they come from an Islamic nation where they just don't seem to like it, they don't seem to fit in with their own religious background but they are very open and very friendly and very willing to talk about faith and we find even between Christians and Muslims, we agree with them more often than anyone else.

Finally, religious motivation was often closely connected to biblical mandates such as hospitality and meeting the needs of the stranger, the poor, or the marginalized. For example, Old Testament references to caring for others, “I think I would like to look at Scripture and see what the Old Testament what it says about hospitality to ones neighbour, that's really important and I think we've lost sight of that.”

# SITE REPORT: TORONTO

## Response to need

The most often mentioned reason or vision for helping newcomers was in response to need. People and churches did not necessarily set out with the objective of helping newcomers settle and integrate. This was regularly a result of changes in the communities in which the churches operated and in which their participants live. However, many of the churches represented had moved from reacting to needs in the community to proactively discovering and addressing newcomer needs. This could involve going out into the community rather than just inviting individuals into the church building. One example of this is the development of partnerships with other organizations that serve newcomers.

Sometimes needs were identified through interaction with the newcomers themselves and listening to what were newcomers to Canada saying they needed. In responding to these needs, churches report a great deal of diversity in the communities serviced (e.g., students, caregivers, children, couples), in the services provided (e.g., ESL, furniture, friendship, family support, plight of refugees) and in the people served (e.g., ethnicity, culture, language and religion). This was sometimes a whole church interest but sometimes it was driven by the concerns of individuals.

## Summary

The values, attitudes, and beliefs that helped guide churches as they helped newcomers integrate and settle into Canadian society were rooted in the values and experiences of individuals and their churches. The many biblical directives on helping those in need had become core personal values. In part because of the need they saw, and sometimes because of the need they had experienced themselves, they responded to the immigrants and refugees they met. Christianity is an evangelistic religion but none of the focus group participants indicated that they treated newcomers as projects to be converted and then discarded to convert the next person. Concern was raised about the importance of establishing and maintaining relationship. Their understanding of conversion was described in language about relationship with God and was understood to be part of the package of addressing people in all their needs (e.g., spiritual, physical, emotional). They often told stories about newcomer experiences to illustrate why they held particular values. Our participants' understanding of their vision for newcomers was rooted in shared experience of immigration, religious motivation, and response to need.

So I think this is what it comes down to: a vision and infrastructure and the calling because it's not always easy to deal with immigrants or refugees cases because again the challenges that they face. There has to be some kind of calling from God towards these people and the most vulnerable times in their lives . . .

## STRUCTURE

As the emphasis on vision being a response to need demonstrates, there was often overlap between what churches were doing and why they were doing it. This is addressed in the second area of exploration in this research which the project defines as "settings, procedures and events that encourage better interaction with immigrants, and that provide access to resources in

## SITE REPORT: TORONTO

implementing the vision.” This question about structure was explored in the focus group through questions related to what churches and individuals were actually doing. Structures include informal relationships like friendships, formal partnerships and religious activities and the provision of resources to aid in integration and settlement.

### **Informal structures: Friendship**

One of the primary factors that contributes to the ability of churches to help newcomers settle and integrate is not the formal structural features of how churches operate but rather personal relationships with individuals or families.

Another group in Toronto that has just started their own ESL Café again these are laypeople, they have their day jobs and just started the thing at Starbucks and advertised and said hey it’s going to be five of us meeting here if anybody wants to meet us come and meet. And then they ended up having people coming to their home for meals and just develop relationships but again it’s just people saying, “Hey I want to connect so how do we help network?”

This element of relationships came up often enough that we coded it separately. One quarter of the codes related to how churches help newcomers integrate and settle focused on relationships. Participants talked regularly of developing long-term relationships, of eating together, of visiting in each other’s homes.

This emphasis on relationships was often paired with the provision of practical help (e.g., rides, how to use public transit, language assistance, housing or job search help) but there was a general desire that this contact develop into friendship. There was some reference to social media but that was often in reference to formal help or connections or the provision of information. It was not clear, however, what newcomers thought of the social media effort but it did allow some contact with newcomers before they arrived in Canada. There was an expressed desire for a greater depth of relationship than simply being a service provider to consumers and some dismay that churches and individuals were occasionally treated this way. Participants typically understood and accepted this did happen sometimes and were willing to do something for free. Some focus group participants indicated that they did have the hope that friendship (and service provision) would prompt newcomers to ask them why they were doing it. In the minds of our participants, relationships and structural support are connected. For example, it is relationships that give newcomers access to the structures that provide emotional support, employment assistance, and directions regarding how to access government services that the churches provide.

Another factor in relationships was geographic proximity. Individuals in commuter churches talked about the difficulty of developing relationships with people who do not live nearby. Others talked about the physical spaces where newcomers congregate (e.g., a park near apartments). Activities like sharing food and being in each other’s homes are also facilitated by proximity.

# SITE REPORT: TORONTO

## **Formal structures**

While there is a large amount of ad hoc provision, as the need presents itself, there are also a large number of formal structured actions. These formal actions start before immigrants even arrive on Canada's shores. Two participants indicated that their churches had networks in other countries that made contact with potential immigrants to help them with the immigration process in their home country. In a less ongoing way, several other participants who were involved in sponsoring had out of Canada connections. Formal structures mentioned include some kind of ESL or English language classes or conversation group. However, participants also mentioned marriage counseling, career/job counseling, settlement services, food banks, furniture provision, hosting programs, soccer camps, movie nights, potluck dinners, etc. These can be categorized as related to partnerships, religion and the provision of resources. A Presbyterian staff person describes their involvement:

We're responsible for helping to find or arrange temporary housing for when they first arrive, to find permanent housing, to take them to the government offices like Service Canada and Service Ontario and apply for their social insurance number so they can apply for their health care (both federal and provincial), drivers licenses and anything like that if they are able and they need us to help them, paying the rent until they're able to pay it themselves up to a period of one year, providing money for food and housing, providing orientation to their local community, helping the children enroll in school, helping the parents to enroll in ESL classes, so locating those and helping them to do that, teaching them how to use public transit. Sometimes you are sponsoring people who aren't used to the Western lifestyle so even very simple things about plumbing and shower curtains and things like that is important to give out at orientation to avoid any floods and what have you. And helping to direct them then if they are interested either to spiritual resources in the community, if they want to join a particular faith group if they're already a member of the faith group, or ethnic organizations within the community where they can become involved, and helping them to find employment. Just basically working with them so that we're not working to create dependency but we're working to help them become independent within the one year period. So often that will also involve the basic budgeting, where to shop, how to find food inexpensively and those kinds of things. So it really runs the gamut according to the need. That's where a particular church would be doing a full sponsorship.

## **Partnership**

Not all groups have the expertise for all things. In these cases they may seek partners. Some larger organizations provide extensive settlement and integration services themselves or through a relationship with a denominationally connected organization. Smaller or less connected churches formed external partnerships with other organizations to provide additional assistance to

## SITE REPORT: TORONTO

newcomers. Another way of expressing this is that some partnerships are based on natural relationships (e.g., denominational networks) and others are based on necessity (e.g., relationships with various government organizations that are responsible for immigration services). Seventeen of the 20 participants mentioned something about partnership.

Partners included other churches, different levels of government and social services. Relationships with these partners were developed for formal structural reasons or for meeting practical personal needs (e.g., providing food, knitting and sewing). There was the occasional reference to competitive behaviour and duplication of services among groups (typically to say that the individual speaking is not like that).

I wish that the church could work together on how to help newcomers because I work in one agency before and I'm still working in this agency. There are so many agencies helping newcomers right now. Mostly they have language class helping with the newcomers. They have settlement services. They have employment services.

Most of the partnerships mentioned were casual (e.g., ad hoc or shared space) but some were more established and long term. In a couple of cases the church or the denomination to which they belonged provided space for settlement services provided by external organizations. As expected, most of the partnerships were with other organizations also involved in settlement services but there were also partnerships with organizations involved in the cultural sphere (e.g., multicultural centres) and in general social services (e.g., food provision).

### *Religion*

A formal structural factor that is closely related to churches' vision for work with newcomers is the way in which the church setting itself provides a structure for working with newcomers. For example, a church of former immigrants has a wealth of personal experience with immigration and this knowledge from past experience can be harnessed to assist current immigrants. The nature of the church itself provides a structural setting in which immigrants are naturally helped with integration and settlement. This might be as simple as providing space to enjoy familiar food or as complex as walking people through the immigration process. Some participants argued that if immigrants were integrated into the faith community it was easier to meet their needs:

I think if you can integrate them into the church life or community then it's easier. Then we could offer a wide range of programs for the whole family based on their needs like employment, work with young people like high school issues, like teenagers, marriage problems, if they have addiction issues you know there's a bunch of resources that we have that we can handle if we get to know them better and if they can be integrated into the community and the life of the church then there is a lot more benefits for them.

## SITE REPORT: TORONTO

Another factor is the nature of Canadian churches themselves. That is, the churches we talked with thought that being a church meant caring for those inside and outside of the church building. There are churches who are only concerned about the people already attending but our sample was biased towards churches with a strong interest in serving non-attenders. The churches we heard about were already geared to providing services to people who were not currently attending their services. This includes both leaders promoting a formal church direction and interested volunteers trying to motivate people from below. As mentioned earlier, some of them also have a theology which encourages attention to the needs of newcomers. In one focus group the question of informal versus formal action arose, in part because one participant belonged to a denomination that has a long history of formal service. There was some agreement that formal action would be of value even though most of the other participants in that focus group were primarily involved in informal actions. Finally, Churches are often already embedded in transnational networks that give them access to structures that support newcomers.

### **Resources**

All this points to many of the resources that churches provide for newcomers. Resource provision was such a prominent theme that we will deal with it separately here. The most commonly mentioned areas of activity included friendship, cultural navigation, physical needs, practical administrative support, and finances. Friendship has been addressed above but the remaining areas provide specific information about the structures churches have set up to actually do something for newcomers.

### ***Cultural navigation***

Churches are in the habit of getting together regularly. These regular meetings provide ready-made structures for helping newcomers navigate Canadian culture. For example, churches have regular events that can serve to take care of or entertain children and thus socialize them into Canadian culture. Churches also introduce newcomers to Canadian culture through their celebration of regular events in both the church and the Canadian calendar. (e.g., Christmas, Easter, Remembrance Day, Thanksgiving, Halloween, Valentine's Day). Churches have some experience helping people integrate into Canadian society. At a general level this would be integration into Canadian church culture, however, for those church participants who were immigrants themselves they have experience navigating and integrating into Canada themselves that they can share. Other types of programs that were developed to help newcomers and established Canadians navigate culture included: host programs, conversation partners, and field trips to tourist attractions.

Training in intercultural competence or sensitivity was also mentioned. There was general agreement that there were cultural differences to navigate for newcomers but also for people working with newcomers. Examples include differences in language, relational expectations, and food. Both informal (e.g., potlucks) and formal (e.g., training sessions) had been developed to help church participants develop these competencies. This is necessary because there are cultural differences between those who have been in Canada for a long time and those who recently arrived:

## SITE REPORT: TORONTO

Some of the challenges that we face is the difference in culture and language between current members of the community who have lived here 40 to 50 years and the new immigrants or refugees who are coming, in some times bulk, and they come in with their own ideologies, mindsets, language, traditions which the older generation or the first immigrant generations came and have already assimilated into the Canadian society and culture are not accustomed to and there's an immediate clash in civilizations, if I may say, which causes some frictions sometimes and causes stereotypes—from both ends I would say.

### *Physical needs and practical administrative support*

Physical needs and practical administrative support was the largest single category of structural help mentioned. Some of this was mentioned under formal structures. However, there is much formal and informal physical support not mentioned above. Casual sharing of resources such as clothing, food and rides were very common and often provided on an ad hoc basis. More elaborate physical support like employment centres and settlement services were often highly structured. Yet even these types of resources were provided by some participants' churches in informal ways. Another category of resources are the regular resources of daily living like gyms, daycare centres, and halls which are common at church facilities. A specific example is a group that has only one newcomer ministry that focuses on immigrants providing caregiver services and highlights the connection between physical and emotional needs:

When we meet a new caregiver we give them a Welcome to Canada bag so it has little items like toiletries, personal items, bus tickets, phone card, long distance cards, bus tickets, Tim Horton cards. We meet caregivers at the mall, on the bus, wherever we meet them, we try to give them a Welcome bag and we also write little notes in them, "Welcome to Canada." We want them to have a good impression. They're far from home. Most of them leave their husbands and children back home so they're feeling very lonely and isolated.

### *Finances*

Finances are a practical structural need that fits in the above categories but was of particular concern to our participants. The topic came up in every focus group. Helping others has costs and being a newcomer to Canada has costs. Participants mentioned both issues. Sponsoring refugees is a very explicit and large cost. In one case the cost of sponsorship was reported to have ballooned from \$26,000 to \$56,000. While not usually on that scale there are also costs for running programs and providing services to individuals. There was mention of different sources of funding. First, churches provide financing for this work. This might be through the regular programs of the church or it might be through individuals who chose to contribute to work with newcomers financially. Second, newcomers themselves contribute to the costs of these programs. There was mention of newcomers contributing to these costs but at the same time regret for having to ask financially strained people for money. Yet, there was also an example of newcomers giving back to a church

# SITE REPORT: TORONTO

financially once they were established in Canada. Third, churches can sometimes find funds from outside their church. One person mentioned a relatively minor \$500 grant received and some funding from a denominational body.

Costs of services are not the only relevant financial issues. Churches are helping newcomers adjust to the different expectations with regards to personal budgeting in a new country. For example, one participant noted how the cost of a cell phone is significantly more in Canada than it is in other countries and that the newcomers they were helping required advice on budgeting at that level.

## Summary

Structures that encourage and develop interaction with newcomers were the most commonly mentioned ways in which churches interacted with newcomers. This included friendships that sometimes developed incidentally to other activities, formal structures that specifically aimed to meet particular newcomer needs, partnerships to gain access to structures beyond the resources of the individual church, the regular structures that are a function of being a Canadian church and such practical resources as cultural navigation and the meeting of physical needs. Together these tell a picture of churches that are intentional about engaging the newcomers in their midst.

## PROCESSES

Vision explains why churches are working to help newcomers settle and integrate into Canada and structures are the way they do it. Processes are the systems put in place that make newcomers active participants in helping themselves and others. We defined processes as “actions that allow immigrants to have greater influence on how the vision is being implemented.” In the focus groups we asked about promising practices for working with newcomers. This was the least developed aspect of newcomer work. However, there was attention to the need for both Canadian and newcomer leadership in this direction and there is some clear movement in this direction.

I think people who have been helped by others, they in turn would like to give back and it's a chain of goodness to others or acts of kindness so that you receive you also want to give back. The main thing is that they find the forum or the ability to give back to others so quite often you see people who received somehow from the church, they also want to help.

## Limited actions taking place

The concerns of immigrant churches and those of long-term established congregations in Canada sometimes differed resulting in different concerns and processes.

First generation immigrant churches, by definition, have a vision and a structure and have processes for engaging newcomers. They are immigrants. Immigrant churches, particularly if they are first generation immigrants, already have experience integrating immigrants into Canadian society and church life. Immigrants want to give back to others and identified their experience with immigration as a motivation for their work with immigrants. While it is not clear how this affects their interaction with communities beyond their own ethnicity they were paying attention to their

## SITE REPORT: TORONTO

own and indicated a desire to reach out to others. However, even here they need to learn and develop new processes to address new challenges. The relationship between parents and children is one of these challenges:

They would say, “Canada is spoiling my children. They’re out in the mall until late at night. I know a lot of Canadian families whose children are not in the mall.” We have to teach them how to make changes because they’re in a new culture but hold on to the values that are still very important to them in terms of their children. And it could be done. Yes they don’t have to throw up their hands and say, “Oh, I’ve lost my children.” No. How do you make changes because if you’re here you got to make changes but at the same time there’s some values that are really important to you to teach your children. Don’t give them up. And it could be done. I’ve seen it happen.

Churches, and parents in those churches, were concerned about the challenges in engaging second-generation immigrants who integrate into Canadian society in a different manner than their first generation parents. This rapidly becomes a concern for newcomer parents as their children engage the culture in ways that are different from those of their parents.

The concerns among long-term established congregations are different. While there were a lot of actions that were directed to newcomers, among long-term established congregations in Canada, there was a general understanding that long-term integration required bringing newcomers into the actions of the churches. For example, churches should involve newcomers in making decisions about their settlement and integration needs, and consult with them before providing services to find out what they wanted and needed.

### **Leadership**

These general concerns for process lead to some discussion of the need for people to lead these processes. Participants argued for the need for somebody to take initiative or leadership in engaging newcomers and recognized the value of formal structures to meet identified needs. Some argued for a process and infrastructure guided by existing church leaders. However, participants also recognized the need to bring newcomers into positions where they can have some say over what is happening in these ministries even as they recognize barriers to overcome before people can enter into leadership. The most commonly mentioned concern was language barriers.

For our group, I think the language barrier is the biggest. And even in our own group, there are not so many people that can do the interpretation or translation for them and if a person can speak English well, they have already a full-time job so they don’t have time to go there together with them during the working hours. So that’s very hard for us to arrange that kind of meeting who can speak English so that’s the first barrier.

# SITE REPORT: TORONTO

One participant noted hesitancy of individuals who had been in Canada for 10–15 years to get involved in children’s work because of their perception of their language ability. Nonetheless, there was recognition of the need to identify leaders among newcomers.

## **Movement in the right direction**

The actions taking place point to movement in the right direction. Furthermore, there were many examples of processes already in place which work to integrate and settle newcomers. Examples include the incorporation of native languages into prayer services, understanding of the need for mutual friendship and social events, like potluck dinners, that encourage participation as equals. Furthermore, there is general acknowledgement that it takes a long time for people to trust each other and of the need for more interaction to counteract this. There is need for cross-cultural competencies on the part of both newcomers and people working with them. The newcomers with whom our focus group participants are engaging want to belong in Canadian society and our participants want to help them attain that desire. This gives reason to think that this general movement in the right direction will gain momentum over time.

So we have a couple of new recruits on our refugee committee, even though she was just a baby at the time from the first family that we sponsored, she and her husband are now involved. Others haven’t quite come on the committee or they’ll kind of come and go on the committee but when we did a big fundraiser in the beginning of April we invited the different refugees that we have sponsored to prepare the food. We had about 150 people who came to this dinner and the bulk of the food was prepared by people who had been sponsored in the past. And so they were quite happy to come and get back in that way so it echoes on which you were saying about food and the importance of food.

## **Summary**

Systems to help newcomers have influence on the vision and structures that affect and serve them were the least developed aspect of how churches engaged newcomers. Nonetheless, most of them recognized the need for such processes and several churches belonged to denominations that had long-term established programs. Churches that had grown out of immigration did not necessarily have processes programmed into their structure. However, personal experience and years of helping newcomers integrated into Canada amounted to the same thing. Furthermore, there was general acknowledgement that integrating newcomers into leadership and mutual cultural understanding were steps towards more effectively dealing with newcomer needs.

## **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS**

There are Toronto area churches that have a vision for helping newcomers settle and integrate into Canadian society, they have structures in place to help accomplish the vision and are working on processes to maintain those structures and bring newcomers into the decision making and service provision. We end with a brief discussion of what we can say about the diversity of approaches to immigrant settlement and integration and focus group participant impressions of effectiveness.

# SITE REPORT: TORONTO

## **Diversity of experiences**

An overview of results demonstrates a range of different values, attitudes, and beliefs that motivate work with newcomers. These include personal experience, a religious motivation and most commonly a response to observed need.

The settings, procedures and events that encourage interaction with and support of newcomers are diverse. At its most casual level this includes meeting practical needs for food and shelter and the offer of friendship according to the specific needs of the newcomers encountered. More formally there are settlement services, financial support, ESL and help navigating a new cultural environment. These services are not supplied by all churches nor are they needed by all newcomers. At a very broad level the needs of immigrants, refugees and students vary because of the different reasons they are in the country. Extensions of these services can lead to formal partnerships with government and non-governmental agencies to provide more complex or specific services than those provided by churches. However, some churches are content or only have the resources to respond to a limited range of immigrants with a limited range of services. Churches are well placed to meet newcomer settlement and integration needs because they have a built-in motivation to help and already have many of the structures necessary to engage and support newcomers.

Processes are a different story. There was a general understanding that best practices meant that newcomers should be involved in those activities which affect them, and some modest efforts to move in that direction. However, for most of our participants' churches that is the best that can be said. They recognize the need and are moving in that direction but with the exception of immigrant churches or those primarily non-immigrant churches that actively consult newcomers about their needs and enjoying their friendship, very few of these churches have any processes to involve newcomers in the vision of engaging newcomers.

## **Perceptions**

The good news is that our participants had a good sense of their strengths and weaknesses. They did not hesitate to talk about the weaknesses of their work and what they could do better. Furthermore, there was movement towards being more effective in addressing the settlement and integration needs of newcomers. Recently one of our case study churches, a large historically significant church in Toronto, renovated their building to provide physical space for newcomer services. This church actively solicits the opinions of newcomers and has started many programs specifically aimed at newcomer integration and settlement, including a host program that pairs a Canadian family with an immigrant family.

## **Conclusions**

Some Greater Toronto Area churches have a vision for helping newcomers, have a large number of diverse structures to do so and recognize the need to extend this work into processes that bring newcomers into active involvement with this work. Perhaps the analogy of the community dinner best illustrates what these diverse churches are trying to accomplish:

## SITE REPORT: TORONTO

Everybody has to eat right? So it's just mixing all of the ingredients around the kitchen so they build relationships there in a very pleasant way. All kinds of people, all kinds of races, nations, it's so beautiful. I'm not a cook but you know I watch and it's so pleasant, it's so beautiful.

## Section 2 - Case Study One: Peoples Church

### INTRODUCTION

The Toronto site of the Role of Churches project investigated best practices in helping immigrants settle and integrate into Canada using a case study of Peoples Church in Toronto. The Peoples Church expanded its vision and created a ministry designed to help newcomers integrate and settle in the GTA. For this case study, the ministry's structure, vision, and process were explored. Five participant-observation sessions and seven one-on-one interviews were conducted. In addition, documents related to newcomer ministry were collected.

The personnel, partners, members and volunteers in the newcomer ministry could identify and articulate specific areas of structure, vision and process that were part of this ministry. These included an emphasis on training, partnerships, cultural diversity, and the transition of vision to more specific attention to newcomers. In the pursuit of this renewed vision participants expressed concerns about commitment, the time and resources needed to reach out to newcomers, and the struggles of cultural adaptation in a new context. Specific actions included the development of training materials for volunteers; ethnic, gender and age specific fellowship groups; co-operation with external settlement and refugee support organizations; one-on-one support for practical needs (e.g., housing, settlement, employment); and the construction of a support centre for newcomers.

The remainder of this report looks at the background of Peoples church, how we conducted our research, and explores our findings in more detail under the categories of vision, structure, and process.

### PEOPLES CHURCH

Founded in 1923, Peoples church is located on a busy street in north eastern Toronto. Its large property and diverse congregation make it a potential asset to its local community and its new slogan, "Toronto is our home. The world is our neighbourhood" expresses its desire to fulfil that potential. This section describes Peoples' shift in mission and vision that led to its increased interest in the needs of its local community and to a specific focus on the needs of immigrants.

#### Background

Since its founding, the Peoples Church has placed a strong emphasis on overseas mission. One of its main objectives has been to gather people in Toronto together to raise money, train, and send missionaries overseas. Today the city of Toronto is home to people from over 200 countries—placing the world at the church's doorstep. Peoples has approximately 5,000 congregants. These individuals come from 89 different people groups and 50% of them were born outside of Canada.

The recognition of the diversity of their community and their membership led Peoples to intentionally examine what they could do in the community in which they were located. Following a strategic review of their ministries, including a survey of its members, the current church vision

# SITE REPORT: TORONTO

and mission was expanded to create opportunities to meet the needs of Toronto's contemporary reality (see Table 1 - Peoples Church Mission and Vision).

**Table 1 - Peoples Church Mission and Vision**

<b>Our Mission</b>
To worship God as we make disciples of Jesus Christ by teaching, praying, giving and serving among the peoples of Toronto and the world.
<b>Our Vision</b>
To be a vibrant Christian community at the heart of a dynamic work of God to advance God's global mission.

(<http://thepeopleschurch.ca/mission-and-values/>)

## **The Newcomers Network (and other immigrant support)**

Out of the renewed mission and vision the Newcomer Network was born. Based on the church's understanding of a Biblical mandate found in Leviticus 19:33-34, and consistent with their founding concerns, the Newcomer Network objectives include:

- *Compassion* - seeking to show God's love through intentional acts of assistance and support
- *Connection* - providing a network of relationships within the church and with partner organizations
- *Community* - creating a venue for gathering and relationship building

To support these objectives, Peoples hired a pastor to lead the newcomer ministry. This pastor supervises a team of four people, under whom are three clusters of volunteers. These three clusters correspond to the Newcomer Network's three foci: refugee claimants, new immigrants, and international students/temporary workers. The team in charge of the various elements of the Newcomer Network is intercultural and some of them share the experience of immigration with newcomers to Canada. The aim is that, as relationships are formed, these three newcomer groups will be integrated into existing and new church ministries. They will also be connected with partner organizations which provide programs and services for newcomer support. In addition, one-on-one support for housing, settlement and employment is provided at the new Welcome Centre which opened in March 2014. The Pastor works with the leadership and volunteers who run the ministries. He explains his responsibility for volunteers and the participatory approach they take to ministry:

For the volunteer level it would be training of the volunteers, assigning responsibilities, constant discussions . . . I would like to empower them, enable them, there would be sort of a sense of responsibility and a sense of

# SITE REPORT: TORONTO

ownership of the ministry initiative. And that's why I involve them always in terms of the decision-making.

Other staff with responsibilities related to newcomers include the Pastor of Community Development and the Pastor of MINT Ministry. The MINT ministry illustrates both Peoples' commitment to newcomers and its work to partner with other like-minded organizations and individuals. MINT refers to "migrant workers, international students, new immigrants, and transient visitors which means tourists and everybody else." This is considered a partnership rather than a ministry created by The Peoples Church. Peoples gives money towards it and provides resources such as space to meet, vehicles for transportation, supplies and volunteers. They also provide some funds towards the pastor's salary. However, it is an independent ministry from the church. Peoples also has 11 ethno-specific groups that while not focusing specifically on the needs of newcomers contribute to making them feel welcome and connecting them to needed resources.

## METHOD

Data collected included documents related to the newcomer ministry, ethnographic observation notes, transcripts of interviews, and collections of quotes offered from individuals who were not interviewed. This included observation of 5 events and interviews with 4 church personnel/volunteers, one network partner and two church members. The eight people talked to included five women and three men. Of these individuals two were Caucasian, three Chinese, one Jamaican, one Filipino, and one Singaporean. The roles these individuals play in the church include: Executive Pastor, Pastor of Community Development, Pastor of MINT Ministry, Pastor of the Newcomers Network, Team Lead Refugee Ministry, and Volunteer.

The executive pastor who is charged with running the entire church was articulate at expressing the actions and values of the church. However, there was general agreement with the direction and evidence from ethnographic observation supported his claims—even though there was some concern that these core values were not being expressed clearly to the larger church membership. The researchers met with the interviewees in different locations and found different degrees of receptivity to the research process but all demonstrated clear interest in the newcomer ministry and the work it was doing. The location of the interviews varied from interviewees' offices, to the welcome centre at the church, to a coffee shop and one individual's home.

The interview questions focused on the church's expanded vision, structure and process. Data was collected from February 2014 through April 2014. Each event observed was an individual instance of the implementation of the church's expanded vision. The researchers who conducted the observations did so as participants in each event. Ethnographic notes were compiled, no names were collected, each session was recorded with permission, and documents relating to each event were gathered and analyzed. Analysis took place using both deductive codes derived from the research objectives and an earlier analysis of focus group data and inductive codes that arose from these data. These data were reviewed multiple times for recurring themes. Thirty-six themes were identified which were then grouped into 8 larger categories. Write up of the analysis was reviewed

# SITE REPORT: TORONTO

by four members of the research team. The research team itself was denominationally diverse and intercultural and included individuals who had immigrated to Canada. Preliminary results were shared with Peoples and revised based on their feedback.

## FINDINGS

A breakdown of the main themes and how often they occurred is listed in Table 2 - Main Themes below. Vision, structure, and process are in bold face to indicate that they were deductive themes derived from the research objectives. Frequency of theme does not necessarily indicate its importance. However, it provides a guide to what was of interest to participants and the issues that warrant closer attention.

**Table 2 - Main Themes**

<b>Theme</b>	<b>N</b>
<b>Structures</b>	140
<b>Vision</b>	83
Training	72
Concerns	69
Newcomer	60
Diversity	59
Relationships	49
<b>Processes</b>	21

Training and relationships were broken out as main themes because they were mentioned so often but for the purpose of this analysis will be analyzed as part of structure. Concerns will be analyzed separately because it captures issues of concern that cross the three project themes. Newcomer and Diversity are codes to help us identify particular characteristics that transcended Vision, Structure, and Processes and as such will not be analyzed independently. Newcomer is a category we added to differentiate between the three categories of immigrants served by Peoples church: immigrant, refugees, and students. Diversity helped us to capture the many mentions of different approaches, experiences, and cultures described by participants.

This section reviews Peoples' vision, structure and processes for helping immigrants settle and integrate into Canadian society. A final section reviews some concerns expressed about this work. Much of the commentary is related to the newcomer ministry. However, other areas of ministry are discussed as they are relevant to the topic.

### **Vision**

The research project defined Vision as "the articulation of values, attitudes, and beliefs that provide direction for how churches can better support immigrant settlement and integration." After structure, vision was the most commonly mentioned aspect of the newcomer ministry. Among newcomer ministry participants there was widespread reference to how the revised mission and vision of the church affected the perspective and actions of the church. This included concern for

## SITE REPORT: TORONTO

the local community, interest in partnering with other organizations, and attention to the historic values of people's church. Three aspects of vision that can be identified in this conversation include attention to a biblical mandate to serve people, response to specific needs, and some shared experience.

There was little direct quotation of the biblical text but there were references to gospel, the example of Jesus, and the mandates of the scriptures. These mandates include a concern for the spiritual and physical well-being of newcomers. Specific examples of this response to need as an aspect of vision included employment mentoring, getting permanent resident status, meeting the needs of refugees, provision of food, and the human needs for friendship and kindness.

However, the most commonly mentioned aspect of vision was the transition from one approach to another. Several individuals talked about the need to add value to their community. One pastor explained:

And so I think we've made a paradigm shift or our thinking is changing to be able to say, if we are a charitable organization and one of those reasons the government gives us charity status is because there's a value added that you have for your community we have to ask ourselves what is the value added for this community for us to be here.

Several others mentioned how the neighbourhood around the church had changed and that their church should be a part of its local community. Sometimes they referenced how the church's history with overseas ministry now needed to be applied locally.

In 1923 . . . the idea was to gather people together to raise money to send missionaries overseas. . . . So if we wanted to send finances and money and people overseas to these groups to hear the gospel it only made sense that those that were coming here to Toronto would also try to reach out to those populations and those groups. . . . About five years ago was an intentional desire to say 'okay, what are we going to do? How can we help in those areas?'

From those creating the vision to those volunteering there was a common understanding of how the vision of the church has expanded. Some of the phrases used to express this new vision included: "paradigm shift," "make a difference in the community," "it's who we are," "holistic," and "going wherever God needs you to be." This vision is manifest in the emphasis on structures such as training and partnership.

### **Structure (including training and relationships)**

Structure is defined as "the settings, procedures and events that encourage better interaction with immigrants as well as provide access to resources in implementing the vision." Broadly speaking, Peoples has a large number of structures in place to help newcomers. These include a physical space (the Welcome Centre), specific ministries (e.g., to refugees and international students), and

## SITE REPORT: TORONTO

full-time staff dedicated to community development, the Newcomers Network and what Peoples called MINT (migrant workers, international students, new immigrants, and transient visitors). Prevalent themes that cross these structures include finances, partnerships, religion, and resources.

### *Finance*

Discussion of finance affected structure both because of the financial needs of newcomers and because of the need to allocate limited funds to the various activities taking place around the church. Considerations for allocation of funds include alignment with the church vision for newcomers, relative need, and impact. For example, paying someone to do something in Toronto is cheaper than flying them somewhere to accomplish similar goals. Funds come directly from the church, from those that participate in newcomer ministry activities, and from raising funds from external organizations. During a review of the preliminary case study data one pastor noted that many of the things the church is involved in don't take money but do take a fair bit of time. This means that they are things that smaller resource-poor churches could accomplish. One example, where time is as valuable a resource as money, is in the development of partnerships.

### *Partnerships*

Partnerships (organizations or individuals that cooperate towards a common goal) was the most commonly mentioned sub-category. Partnerships identified included relationships with different levels of government, refugee support services, community organizations like the YMCA, ESL programs, and a variety of churches. One participant spoke of Peoples having a "core value of collaboration" and these data indicate that they are working hard to put this value into practice. The executive pastor explains:

So for us, collaboration all of a sudden means that this just isn't about us and what we can gain from a relationship, its 'what can we put into relationships?' So that means that it's not about just Peoples Church, it's about the people and organizations that are around us and how do we connect and link with them in a collaborative effort to make things better here in our community.

Discussion of partnerships extended to figuring out better ways to collaborate within the church and bringing in outside organizations to provide services beyond the expertise of the church (e.g., a partnership with the Tyndale Intercultural Ministry Centre to train people for ministry at a low cost). Partnerships also extend their work beyond Sunday and beyond the walls of the church.

### *Pre-existing resources of religious institutions*

Peoples already had many structures in place that could serve the needs of newcomers that were part of being a church with 5000 participants. These structures include regular church services, small groups of people who meet together regularly, a system of finding and developing volunteers, staff with expertise in meeting spiritual and physical needs, and a predilection towards serving their community. A religious community of this size also has a large number of people that can contribute through their own immigration experience and facilitate groupings with individuals of

## SITE REPORT: TORONTO

similar backgrounds (e.g., south Asian, Caribbean). Peoples church recognizes that they have assets that can be used to serve their local community. The executive pastor explains:

We need to make a difference in this community because we're physically in this community. So our building needs to be open to people, people need to be able to come and use it and we need to be able to walk around and people need to know okay that church there, there is a value to have them in our community and we want them in our community.

Examples of how they have used these assets include the construction of a Welcome Centre, hiring and use of staff and volunteers, and intentional training of intercultural ministry. The Welcome Centre is a physical space built on to the front of Peoples church. It faces a major road and is easily visible and accessible from the bus stop on that road. As you approach the Welcome Centre you first encounter an outdoor patio in front of large glass doors and floor to ceiling windows. Inside the Welcome Centre is a casual space for mingling, a kitchen, round tables and chairs for formal or informal gatherings and several meeting rooms that are used by church staff and by community organizations that provide services to newcomers. The Centre is decorated in brick with accents of pressboard to illustrate some of the transitional nature of the people the space is designed for. A smaller example is opening up their parking lot to be used as a farmers market on Tuesdays. This both serves the community and breaks down barriers between the church and the residences of the local area.

Having full time staff and a large number of volunteers allows Peoples to be intentional in their vision implementation and planning. Many of the participants in our focus groups became involved in work with newcomers in an ad hoc and almost accidental manner because of the character of their local community or because of an observed need. While some of Peoples' work with newcomers started that way, others have been developed with intentionality and long-term objectives. For example, the intentionally developed Newcomer Network committee includes an immigrants team of five members, a refuge team of four members, and an international students team of five members. They also have seven different "ethnic" fellowship groups. Such work is also facilitated by the size of Peoples' facility and the number of attendees. They currently have 17 volunteers involved in this ministry.

One resource was mentioned so often we assigned it its own code: training. Participants consistently mentioned issues related to training (or learning). Training was mentioned both at the level of training people for leadership and in training newcomers to adapt to the Canadian context. The Pastor of the Newcomers Network explains:

It's more of what it means to be multicultural and intercultural. So basically that's the essential training. Later on there will be trainings for volunteers, how to become more effective ministry partners. For other trainings that would be skill-set specific or ministry specific then that would be in partnership with the other organizations.

## SITE REPORT: TORONTO

Training included both formal classroom style training and active participation as a way of modeling or experiencing specific teaching. For example, executive leaders spoke about training others to carry out the vision so it can be passed on to others. There was an understanding that more people were needed to accomplish the goals espoused by the Newcomer Network. Volunteers were particularly concerned with having the proper training to effectively carry out their duties. Comments about training were often paired with an awareness of the need for cultural intelligence, the different training needs of different groups, and the need to be aware of the diversity of all individuals involved (compassion, community). One volunteer expressed her appreciation:

I was present only for the first part of the training, but it was an amazing session because I learned that there is a wide spectrum in the interpretations of our experiences. This can enhance the relationship with the newcomer, but it can also make it difficult so it is important to trust God to bridge the gap.

Training events such as a cultural sensitivity workshop demonstrated intentionality in implementing structures to support the renewed vision. Peoples has also developed some structural partnership with other organizations that share these goals.

The larger Role of Immigrants research project conducted focus groups with individuals involved in newcomer ministry around Toronto. These data identified an overwhelming concern for access to resources. While resources were discussed among Peoples church participants, it did not have the same urgency we observed in the focus groups. Further analysis of the data is necessary to identify why this is so, but it may indicate that Peoples had done a good job providing resources for those involved in this work.

### Process

In this project process was defined as, “actions that allow immigrants to have greater influence on how the vision is being implemented.” The change of the churches vision and structures like finances and training contribute to the increased influence of newcomer within the church almost incidentally. This section reviews some specific actions that aimed to increase newcomer influence.

Influence in an organization the size of Peoples church happens at different levels. There is the level of participation in the activities of the church. At this level the multicultural diversity of the congregation encourages widespread involvement. Then there is the level of specific ethnic groups within the conversation. At this level peoples works to assure that specific groups are meeting their own needs but not isolated from other groups. That is people have a natural affinity for people like themselves but co-operation and common cause requires inter-group interaction. The Pastor of Community Development articulates this as a concern and future hope:

You have got a lot of different people who attend the South Asian Fellowship because they like attending it and they're not South Asian. And I would love

## SITE REPORT: TORONTO

to see that reflected a wee bit in the leadership of those groups too so that people aren't writing them off as, oh well that's just the Caribbean Fellowship right? But as seeing them as a viable hey I'd love to be part of that. But I wouldn't want to see a Caribbean Fellowship run by all people that are not from the Caribbean.

This quote points to the level of intergroup leadership and the work of every group reaching out to every group. There is a need for groups and individuals that bridge between the newcomer and the various activities and opportunities in the church. Also at this level we have the composition of the teams that run the various ministries. The Pastor of MINT ministries explains how his team developed:

Ideally it would be a multicultural team to start off with and that will become the seed, the core of a multicultural ministry. So like I said Peoples Church is a multicultural church. I have one African, one Caribbean, one Indian, one Chinese and all that therein they start attracting others.

Finally, processes to involve immigrants in the changes being implemented require the integration of diverse immigrants into leadership teams. We have seen that in the individual ministry teams described above but Peoples has also worked hard to implement this at the top level pastoral leadership. Of the 4 paid staff we talked to, two were Caucasian, one was Filipino, and one was Singaporean. This last individual runs an independent but associated ministry. We also talked with the refugee team lead who is Chinese. This is a volunteer role but has much more responsibility associated with it than just attending events. In addition to this position there are two other volunteer and unpaid team leads for the Newcomer Network. There are also 11 cultural ministries that have leads that are volunteer and unpaid. Cultural ministries are ethnic specific ministries within the church. Having some experience with cultural transition and immigration helps these individuals better interact with others who are having this experience currently.

### Concerns

New initiatives open up new questions and Peoples church pastors and volunteers identify several areas that affect their vision: culture, commitment, and physical needs.

There was a lot of discussion of how to bring different cultures together to act, minister, and worship together. There were discussions of how increasing the diversity of leadership increases the diversity of participants and of how different cultures and ethnicities have different approaches to engaging society in areas as diverse as money, eye contact, and food. This means that everyone needs to adapt, "we're learning about how to be culturally sensitive to one another and that doesn't just mean the white Canadians learning to be cultural sensitive but vice a versa." Diversity promotes diversity but that means that leadership change can change group composition:

A Zimbabwean doctor joined our ministry and stayed with us for a year, we literally had a change of colour, we started having Africans and Jamaicans

## SITE REPORT: TORONTO

come. [They might say this doctor] is me, he relates to me and I relate to him. After [he] left suddenly now I haven't had that many Africans come. I don't think it's because we are exclusive or we turn them off, it's just human nature.

There was some agreement on the need to bring diverse peoples together to interact and act together. However, it remained a learning experience:

So learning how to be able to present the gospel sensitively without offending the people you talk to. I think many Canadians do not know how to do it so they withdraw and they don't do it and it's easier to send out a missionary over to Africa, India or wherever to speak directly to them, right? So yeah I think we need to have people I guess not necessarily like myself but people who have been in that place, new immigrants reaching out to new immigrants, or recent immigrants reaching out to new immigrants. I've been there, I know what to do, I know what you need and I give it to you, and I hope you find it.

This cultural knowledge was more than just knowing about different cultures. It includes understanding and trying to put yourself in another's place:

You see so you get philosophy differences because sometimes the problem is you've got well-meaning Canadians who've never been in that same position as I have been. An international student in a strange land and I'm home sick, I am thinking of rice, I'm thinking of noodles and you give me pizza and bread fine you know I'll push it down but [heavy sigh] how nice if I could get a warm plate of rice. So I can bridge that you see I can put myself in there.

Cultural awareness is closely connected to integration. Serving food that people like and are familiar with helps them to feel welcome. Getting them involved with others similar to themselves is an additional move forward but the church also recognizes that integration with different people and involvement in leadership is also a necessary step. They recognize that the diversity of cultures is both an asset for their ability to serve their community and a challenge when trying to get diverse peoples to work together.

Working with volunteers remains a challenge. People make commitments to participate or to get something done and then do not follow through on their commitments. Several individuals also identified trepidation from church members as they were asked to be involved in the newcomer ministry. There was uncertainty about what they would be responsible for and how much time would be involved. Clear guidelines on what is required appear to be helping. From the perspective of the newcomer, commitment to church ministry can be restricted by the practical needs of survival. The Pastor of MINT ministry gives an example:

## SITE REPORT: TORONTO

I got somebody who's very passionate for the ministry but he needs a job and I can't find money to pay him as a job. So he has to go and find a job so he's not been with us for the last year or two and I think it's a waste because he's got passion and he's got the love for the kids, he's got the skills.

This identifies the churches' awareness that so many of the structures and processes that arise out of vision are dependent on access to physical resources. These include trying to navigate a confusing immigration system, getting a job, food, and housing. This also includes the resources of the existing congregation, some of whom are not comfortable having people over to their homes.

While these are legitimate concerns, the vision, structure and processes put in place by Peoples are already contributing to addressing these concerns.

### SUMMARY

Peoples Church has a vision for helping immigrants integrate and settle into Canadian society. This vision is manifest physically through the specific work of the Newcomer Network and the general work of the church engaging with the diversity of its members. Peoples Church has taken steps to formally train members and volunteers on how to better engage newcomers. Formal structures include cultural sensitivity training and collaborative opportunities to partner with other churches that are developing vision, structures and processes to help a diversity of people and churches build their own programs or train personnel. These and other initiatives are showing themselves to be best practices in the integration and settlement of immigrants, refugees and students into Canadian society. Furthermore, Peoples has developed processes that bring Newcomers into the life and work of the church and encourage them to have influence over the activities that affect them. There is ample evidence of progress in fulfilling the Peoples newcomer ministry objectives of compassion, connection, and community.

## Section 3 - Case Study Two

### INTRODUCTION

The room was hot from the multiple water pipes running across the ceiling as the people came in. It was a long rectangular basement room of a midrise building and it housed the water heaters for the entire building. With no windows to open and no air conditioning available, the church staff had set up two fans toward the back of the room in hope of circulating some type of breeze to relieve the attendees. This was the church's Wednesday afternoon Bible Study that was created specifically for immigrants and refugees who had to work on Sundays. The restaurants that employ them are much busier and demanding on Sundays than they are on Wednesday afternoons. Despite the heat from the pipes and the noise from the fans, the people came, one after another with smiles on their faces, exchanging pleasantries with each other. The group was small, around ten at most but the comradery and community was strong. With a grin on his face, the pastor whispers, "The one good thing about this room is that it reminds us of being back in China, like the underground church in China." This prayer meeting is only one of the ways in which this church tries to engage some of the most underprivileged immigrants in inner city Toronto. Even though this is a small church, its ten years of experience has given it a vision for helping immigrants, structures in place to make it happen, and processes for continuing the ministry.

This case study report is based on five interviews with key leaders and participants at the case study church and at a suburban supporting church, review of church documents (e.g., bulletins, tracts), review of supporting church documents (e.g., ministry proposals, strategic plan), and observation of church activities (e.g., ethnographic reports, pictures). Two observed events took place in Mandarin. In these cases a participant who translated for the researchers described some of what was taking place. This research took place during April and May 2014.

### VISION

This church is a small inner city church that was started by an immigrant pastor and his wife who migrated from Hong Kong to Canada in 1996. They were part of an exodus to escape Hong Kong, the former British territory, before it returned to the rule of China in 1997. They first landed in Montreal and started a business. As newly landed immigrants, they hoped for a fresh start in Canada. They had marital problems back in Hong Kong, but being in a new country exasperated the problems even more. However, their business was situated next to a church and they sought help. A year later, their marriage was renewed and their lives transformed by what they describe as "we went to church and we found the 'truth'." The pastor felt so strongly about his personal renewal that it birthed in him a "vision of revival" within the church and the Chinese community. This vision has been one of the main themes pushing this church since it started in 2009, along with a vision for evangelism and a response to the needs of people.

## SITE REPORT: TORONTO

For these last five years, this small inner city church has mainly been serving new Chinese immigrants to Canada, and in recent years they have focused on people who are non-status or marginalized refugees (mainly Mandarin speaking). They also provide resources for the homeless. Their Sunday Service attendance ranges from 65 to 70 people and most of those are immigrants or refugees who now are permanent residents. However, they estimate that they are in contact with over 1000 people. Their vision for revival was enhanced with a vision to meet the needs of immigrants and refugees because many of them are abused and victimized. The pastor says:

They seem to be totally lost in a strange place. Many of them come with very minimal understanding of what this Toronto is. They just don't know what to expect in this city. I feel that quite a few of them were misled in the immigration/refugee process. It was like they were cheated back in their home country. They are told 'Once you get into Canada, you'll find a good job, you'll get good money and things.' Actually they pay a lot of money to the human traffickers and smugglers to help them get into Canada and there are many immigrants who are middlemen of this. . . . We do not get involved in those things. What we care about are the souls of people. They need Jesus, desperately they need Jesus because they left their families in China and they're in Canada to find a new life and it is very difficult for them to start. They have language problems. They have all kinds of difficulties. They do not know where the work is going to come from.

To make matters more difficult, some in their own denomination do not understand why they were working with this particular demographic. The church is not justifying the choices of those they serve, but they do not think that such choices mean that these immigrants' spiritual and physical needs should not be met.

This church believes that immigrants and refugees are the most vulnerable and hurting people in society. They try to help anyone and everyone they come into contact with. "I have 1000 people in my phone but actively communicate with 500. Not everyone attends church on Sunday. Some of them drop off after they receive their immigration status." Despite the fact that many do not stay with the church after receiving help from them, the church continues to serve immigrants and refugees whole-heartedly. The Assistant Pastor, recognizing that they cannot judge immigrants and refugees while they are helping them, says:

Don't look down on people. Be wise and spiritually lead on how to help these people. Do not compromise with them but stand on grace . . . Biblically evaluate and spiritually lead on how to help. A lot of churches only pay attention to the illegal part of immigration rather than the refugee as a person.

## SITE REPORT: TORONTO

This church is intentional about working with immigrants and refugees because of their vision for revival and the opportunity to meet the needs of these people.

### STRUCTURE

In terms of structure, they have found that flexibility in how they operate, partnerships with other organizations, and personal engagement with those they serve are pivotal to their ministry with immigrants and refugees.

A ministry that is hard to explain and resource poor necessitates flexibility in the structure of how it operates. Due to budgetary constraints, the church's gatherings on Sundays and Wednesdays are in two different locations. These locations were found through partner organizations and prayer groups. "We have a Spadina prayer group and we meet once a month in this area, including a Baptist church [and other organizations]. The ministers that work in this area get together and pray for one another."

Part of that flexibility involved finding other organizations to join them as partners. The church is under the umbrella of a large evangelical denomination in Canada, which supports them financially and through prayer for their ministry. However, the biggest contributor to their ministry is a large suburban Chinese church of a different denomination located in north Toronto. This church is both their biggest supporter in terms of volunteer/program resources (no other church is currently partnering with them in this capacity) as well as the biggest financial contributor. Although they are both Chinese churches, they differ drastically. They speak two different languages (Cantonese & Mandarin), their members are composed of individuals with different economic statuses as the suburban church is mainly middle to upper class people while the inner city church is not, and the suburban church includes many long-established Canadians while many of the people in the inner city church are first generation immigrants. Although these could be obstacles to overcome when forming a partnership, it is their shared vision for ministry with immigrants and refugees that has brought this partnership together. The liaison for this large suburban church explains:

Later that year in 2008 we sat together with the minister then and we had a few meetings to actually plan out how we can launch the ministry and how we can address the needs and then we brought those needs back to [our church] and try to find volunteers and formed a team to do the ministry and then in the year 2009 in April we started the English teaching class ... so that's the start of the ministry.

The basis for this partnership was for this suburban church to participate with intentional immigrant and refugee ministry in downtown Toronto. They find that they can be a huge help in terms of structure and resources for this inner city church, and at the same time expose their own church members to ministry that is outside of their context. They not only wanted to participate in evangelism but also discipleship training.

## SITE REPORT: TORONTO

The vision [for the suburban church] is that this is a partnership and a training discipleship program. So it's not just a way for us to help them but we are receiving the opportunity to train and disciple our local people in our church as well.

The inner city church is responsible for the day-to-day activities of the immigrant and refugee ministry while the suburban church, which is a part of a different denomination, provides monthly financial assistance and volunteers to help teach ESL as well as relational support (e.g., opportunities for conversation, friendship development). The partnership between the two churches started as a single event for ESL services but has now grown to a monthly fellowship of relationship building and interaction as well as a monthly expense and outreach ministry. One participant from this partner church explains how the ministry benefits both organizations:

There are other ethnic groups that have small churches, maybe an Indian group or Pakistani group or whoever, they are smaller and are struggling but at the same time you have some well-off suburban churches that can build a bridge and send help to them and at the same time receive the blessing from these inner urban churches . . . we can draw on each other for the different experiences and as resources for spiritual growth.

Partnerships aid the organizational structure of the ministry but the core of the ministry is personal contact with individuals in the local community. The example of street ministry illustrates an informal structure that provides a contact with the community that leads to many new contacts for the church. The Associate Pastor implemented a specific strategy for evangelism to immigrants and refugees through a street ministry involving prophetic dance, passing out tracks, and having spiritual conversations with people on the street.

Normally I hand out Chinese and English tracks . . . I hold the cross and I dance a little bit and give the Kingdom message. Canadians are familiar with the cross so I don't need to give away tracks but most of the time I give away a lot of tracks.

The Associate Pastor is usually the only person involved in the street ministry, which is done 5 days a week for 2-3 hours each day. Although there is only one person doing the street ministry, it has become one of the most effective outreach programs for reaching immigrants and refugees for this church.

While the flexibility, partnership, and personal engagement structures sustain the ministry there are many other specific structures that have been developed to support immigrants. These include weekly church services and prayer meetings, street ministry (e.g., evangelism, conversation), an ESL program, non-professional advice for navigating Canadian culture (e.g., legal system,

## SITE REPORT: TORONTO

counselling, healthcare), interpretation and translation services, help with immigration, and social networking.

### PROCESS

The process of figuring out how to engage newcomers according to their needs and then help them to become integrated into the community is complicated by the diversity of the people they serve but they are starting to see more integration taking place.

This inner city church has had to tweak many of their processes over the years and much of the time it was through trial and error. At one time, they had an initiative for an airport transportation ministry to drive immigrants to the airport or pick up new arrivals coming into the country. This seemed like a great idea at the time but it did not survive, as there were not many volunteers who could help, there were not enough resources to sustain it, and the number of people requesting transportation declined. Although this airport transportation initiative didn't work out, it was a connection point for further ministry opportunities. The Associate Pastor explains:

I got involved with refugees lives. I went to ESL studies with them. I went to night shift work with them. I go to the airport refugee place on Airport Rd. I think it's the immigration place because lots of people didn't get there landed immigrant status, so every night they had to go there and report. I had to go with them to see the social worker and interpret for them.

Such processes are tied closely to the church's vision for meeting the needs of immigrants and refugees.

The personal relationships that develop through intensive engagement with the lives of immigrants can pay off in terms of involvement with the services of the church and sometimes immigrants engage become involved in the life and work of the church. For example, of the church's six member board three of them were once refugees.

### CONCERNS

This inner city church also spoke about many concerns that they have dealt with over the years. Some examples include volunteer commitment, finances, and male volunteer involvement.

One of the primary concerns for this church was getting volunteer commitment to their ministry. Getting involved with and committing to an inner city church, which focuses largely on marginalized immigrants and refugees, is very difficult for most people and even for some organizations. When it comes to the street ministry, it has been hard for them to find people who are willing to commit time to help with passing out tracts or to engage immigrants and refugees in spiritual conversations. The Associate Pastor explains:

## SITE REPORT: TORONTO

I do not want to work alone all the time. I have asked God to bring different people to work with me... Now I am praying that more people would want to do this and join me. Even if it's people from other churches and they can only do it for half an hour, I would say come.

She describes having moments of loneliness and struggles with the difficulty of ministering alone. She believes the Bible encourages outreach ministry to take place in pairs for reasons such as companionship and safety. Even getting support from other churches or organizations has been difficult because these other ministries sometimes express strong negative feelings about non-status refugees. An informant explains, "Refugees have a negative reputation or image so when we got involved in this type of ministry there is a lot of misunderstandings and judgements of us." In fact, working with marginalized refugees was the basis for the pastors of this inner city church to leave their previous church and denomination because their previous church did not approve of the dealings with refugees. As the pastor put it, "They just wanted normal ordinary people with elevated education and stuff." From the experience with their previous church, they realize that the commitment from organizations for resources such as volunteers and finances are a major obstacle.

Concern for finances is a heavy burden that the inner city church deals with daily. As one informant stated, "We have very limited resources. Finances are the main weak points." And again, "It is very difficult to run a church without funding. Especially a refugee church because those are poor people and we can't expect them to donate money to support a church. There is no way." The partnership with a major denomination and with the large suburban church has helped tremendously but more is needed. The liaison of the suburban church states, "They are individual pastors that do not have an organization behind them to support their work and personally do not have a protection of salary." And the pastor states, "There is [the denomination] who give us subsidy. It is not a lot of money but it's \$500 a month since the beginning of the church existence."

Another concern with commitment in the partnership with the suburban church was the lack of male involvement with the ministry. There are approximately eight people from the suburban church that are consistently present and active each month with the ministry to immigrants and refugees at the inner city church, but all of them are women. One informant stated, "Traditionally guys are less active in our fellowship." When asked for the opinion on why there is a lack of male involvement, the informant summed it up as lack of time due to work commitment.

These concerns have some impact on their ministry goals. However, they are also an indication of the passion they have for their work. If they did not care deeply about the work they were doing they would not be concerned if the resources were not available to support it.

### SUMMARY

This inner city church is distinctive in many respects. Its core members are Chinese and yet it reaches out cross culturally. It is emotionally expressive in a culture known for being reserved. It operates independently and yet has gained the support of two different denominations. It has its

## SITE REPORT: TORONTO

own vision and yet gets participation from outside of the church. Structural considerations such as the need for flexibility, the value of partnerships and the role of personal relationship play a role in the effectiveness of its ministry. Flexibility in process has allowed the ministry to continue in less than ideal circumstances. Even its concerns reflect its vision for greater engagement with urban immigrants. In total, this church provides an evocative illustration of the way in which churches that develop according to observed needs become unique entities that reflect the context of the people who start them, the people who do the work, and the people who are served.

## References

- Heisz, Andrew. 2006. "Canada's global cities: Socio-economic conditions in Montréal, Toronto and Vancouver." *Trends and conditions in census metropolitan areas*. Ottawa: Statistics Canada.
- Janzen, Rich, Mark D. Chapman and James W. Watson. 2012. "Integrating Immigrants into the Life of Canadian Urban Christian Congregations: Findings from a National Survey." *Review of Religious Research* 53: 441-470.
- Ley, David. 2008. "The Immigrant Church as an Urban Service Hub." *Urban Studies* 45, no. 10: 2057-2074.
- Siemiatycki, Myer. 2011. "Governing immigrant city: Immigrant political representation in Toronto." *American Behavioral Scientist* 55, no. 9: 1214–1234.