

## Integrating Immigrants into the Life of Canadian Urban Christian Congregations: Findings from a National Survey

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**Abstract** In just one generation the cultural face of Canadian society has been transformed. The relative level of immigration has increased rapidly as has diversity among those immigrants. This article reports on the findings of a national survey that offers a baseline of how and to what extent local Canadian Christian congregations are responding to this cultural diversity. In particular, it explores how churches are integrating immigrants within the life of their local congregations. This article uses a systems change perspective to frame immigrant integration. This perspective emphasizes three requirements for change: vision, structure and processes that promote immigrant integration. Data was collected using an online survey of urban congregations in the nine urban Canadian communities having an immigrant population above the national average (20% foreign-born). Using these data this article explores the full range of immigrant integration efforts from the initial welcome to inclusion into congregational life. It describes the present status of immigrant integration, details reported successes and challenges and notes respondent suggestions for better integration. Results of this survey provide first-time baseline insights into how a range of urban Christian congregations from across Canada are presently responding to the Canadian immigrant reality.

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## A Changing Context: Increasing Immigrant Diversity

In just one generation the cultural face of Canadian society has been transformed. As a historical immigrant-receiving country Canada has always depended on immigration for its social and economic growth (Alboim 2009). Yet two recent trends have combined to create a new immigrant reality in Canada.

First is the rising *immigrant population*. In order to counteract an aging population and low birth rates, the Canadian government adopted a policy of immigration growth in the mid-1980s (Immigration Canada 1990). Sustained over two decades, these increased levels appear to have borne their desired effect. In the most recent Census (2006), 20% of residents were born outside of the country, the highest percentage in 75 years (Statistics Canada 2007). Indeed Canada has the highest relative level of immigration of any major western country, receiving about a quarter million immigrants annually (Citizenship and Immigration Canada 2009a). Pushed by perceived economic imperatives, the dependency on immigration is expected to only increase with immigration accounting for 100% of labour market growth in the next decade (Citizenship and Immigration Canada 2009a; Conference Board of Canada 2009).

Beyond higher numbers of immigrants, the second trend is toward increased *diversity among immigrants*. Amendments to Canadian immigration policy towards a point system in the 1960s and 1970s widened the door to receive immigrants from non-traditional, non-Western sources (Citizenship and Immigration Canada 2009b). The 2006 Census indicated that over half (58%) of immigrants coming to Canada came from Asia, with the leading source countries including: China (14%), India (12%), Philippines (7%), Pakistan (5%), United States (4%), South Korean (3%), Romania (3%), and Iran (3%) (Statistics Canada 2006). Fully 75% of recent immigrants (those arriving in the previous 5 years) were visible minorities, with the visible minority population growing five times faster than the total Canadian population (Statistics Canada 2008). More than 200 countries of origin were reported by immigrants in the last Census, with the vast majority of immigrants landing in Canada's urban centers (Statistics Canada 2007). The cities of Toronto and Vancouver rank very highly among world cities with respect to their per capita foreign-born population (first and third respectively) (Toronto City Summit Alliance 2003).

This article focuses on how one part of Canadian society, the urban Christian congregation, is responding to this burgeoning cultural diversity. More specifically, this article reports on the findings of a national survey that offers a baseline of how and to what extent local church congregations are integrating immigrants within the life of their local congregations. Immigration research that considers issues of religion is beginning to emerge in Canada (Bramadat and Biles 2005; Conner 2009; Koenig 2005). Yet very few studies have considered the processes and outcomes of recent immigrant integration within Canada's most common religious

settings—Christian congregations. The limited studies that do exist focus on a narrow range of Christian denominations or within single geographic communities. To our knowledge this article reports on the first inter-denominational and national survey to broadly explore immigrant integration within Canadian Christian churches.

### **Framing Immigrant Integration Within Churches**

Today there is growing church literature that addresses how church congregations must relate and adapt to their increasingly pluralistic context (e.g., Guder 1998; Nelson 2008; Newbigin 1989). Among this emerging literature are insights into what local congregations must do to integrate immigrants into their church life. This literature typically considers singular aspects of congregational change, for example encouraging congregations to evolve through developmental stages of intercultural awareness over time (Sheffield 2005), adopting progressive principles of practice (Yancey 2003), or enhancing leadership capacity (Foster 1998).

Immigrant integration, however, can be viewed more holistically which requires a more comprehensive response in order to be effective. A systems change perspective can assist here. Systems change can be defined as an “intentional process designed to alter the status quo by shifting and realigning the form and function of a targeted system” (Foster-Fishman et al. 2007, p. 197). System components are viewed to be interconnected within a living system—a system where change in one part impacts and redefines the whole (Kelly 2006). The interdependence of system components is consequently foregrounded, with the health of the social system dependent on developing and accessing resources that facilitate system functioning (Trickett 2009).

Such a systems change perspective allows for a more holistic and dynamic analysis of immigrant integration than the church literature presently offers. This perspective is also consistent with current definitions of immigrant integration that view integration as being an intentional, dynamic and multi-strategy process of transformation in which the adaptation of all members (new and old) is mutually interdependent and which creates a new whole that is greater than the sum of its parts (Petsod 2006; Tolley 2004). These definitions emphasize that immigrant integration is viewed as a “two-way street” with both newcomers and the host society adapting and changing to a diversified population. While immigrants go through a process of acculturation and adaptation to their new society (Berry 2005), so too the burden for social inclusion also rests on society and its institutions (Canada Immigration and Refugee Protection Act 2002). Integration therefore involves mutual obligations and a negotiated dialogued between immigrant newcomers and others in society (Biles et al. 2005; Janzen et al. 2007).

This article views the integration of immigrants within local congregations through a systems change lens. It is not uncommon to frame local congregations as an interdependent system that undergoes continual adaptation and change (Van Gelder 2008). Biblical tradition itself portrays the church less as a static, closed organization than as a living organism (see I Corinthians 12:25). If such a systems change perspective allows for a more holistic analysis of immigrant integration

within congregations, it does so by suggesting that efforts must be made at three broad levels: (1) promoting a church *vision* in which immigrants not only passively belong but also change the very character of the church, (2) creating church *structures* (or forms) that facilitate the integration of immigrants, and (3) adopting church *processes* (or functions) that facilitate immigrant integration. Below we briefly review these three levels, framed as the key congregational requirements for effective immigrant integration.

### Vision for Immigrant Integration

The first requirement for effective immigrant integration within church congregations is to create vision. Vision provides direction as to the kind of social system that is to be desired. Vision is cast by leaders who forward their opinions, theories and policies about the underlying principles that should guide system behaviour and what resources are to be viewed as valuable (Foster-Fishman et al. 2007). Vision is a prerequisite for transformational change as its goal is to challenge existing attitudes, values, and beliefs in such a way that represent a shift in system norms (Sun and Scott 2005).

Applied to the integration of immigrants within congregations, vision involves three main dimensions. To begin, vision assumes *intentionality*. More than simply drawing immigrants “under one church roof,” immigrant integration is intentionality cultivated by church leaders who stress that reaching out to and integrating immigrants is part of the congregation’s culture and mission, providing teaching and preaching on why and how this happens, and creating spaces for constructive dialogue that fosters mutual learning and growth (Law 1996; Yancey 2003).

Another dimension of vision-casting is to articulate the *resources* that come when diverse people intermingle. Here immigrants and Canadian-born are seen to be mutual resources for each other, resources that would otherwise not be available. For example, immigrants provide opportunity for the Canadian-born to serve others and experience fuller expressions of Christianity (Vaughan 2009). Immigrants benefit from practical settlement assistance and the opportunity to belong to a faith community (Ley 2008). But perhaps the greatest resource coming from integrating immigrants into the local congregation is the humility that comes by embracing cultural diversity. The presence of Christians from diverse world regions reminds the North American church of its global character that supersedes any one culture (Ortiz 1996; Vaughan 2009).

A third dimension of vision is to provide the *principles and values* that should guide integrative efforts. These principles and values draw on Biblical texts as their moral strength (Carnes 2003; Conde-Frazier et al. 2004; Law 1996). They can be grouped into three categories as found in the broader literature related to organizational cultural responsiveness (Janzen et al. 2007, 2010a): (a) values that address issues of culture (ensuring belonging and participation of all cultural groups), (b) values that address issues of power (ensuring equity and self determination), and (c) values that address the intersection of culture and power (ensuring synergistic and reciprocal relationships between people of differing cultures).

## Structures that Facilitate Immigrant Integration

The second requirement is to create social structures that facilitate immigrant inclusion. Structures are the elements of a social system that facilitate opportunity for improved interactions. Concretely they are the settings, procedures and events that provide access to the resources available within the social system. The goal of structures is to better connect people and resources within the system in a way that promotes well-being (Kelly et al. 2000).

Social structures provide opportunities for mutually beneficial interactions between immigrants and Canadian-born and connect both to resources needed to adapt to their changing environment. To begin, congregations can create physical *settings and events* (places and spaces) of mutual exchange. Examples could include providing space within a church building for immigrant communities to meet among themselves (Pentecostal Church USA 2009), holding joint services with ethnic congregations, and arranging “fellowship meals” or other friendship events (Neufeld 2001).

Christian churches can offer a range *social and spiritual programs* for immigrants (Ley 2008). Unruh and Sider’s (2005) typology of church ministry can be adapted to help classify these diverse programs: (a) providing settlement and relief services to meet immediate needs (e.g., Kataoka et al. 2006), (b) providing personal development programs to empower immigrants to improve their physical, emotional, intellectual, relational or social status (e.g., Huang 2008), (c) providing community development programs to renew the building blocks of a healthy community (e.g., Gonzalez y Perez 1999), (d) pursuing systemic change activities that attempt to transform unjust political, economic, environmental or cultural systems (e.g., Ng 2004; United Church of Canada 2007), and (e) holding evangelistic activities (e.g., Seim 1999). Congregations can also sponsor immigrants to come to Canada either under the refugee or family reunification class (McKinlay 2008; Mummert and Bach 1992). Finally congregations can contribute financial or in-kind resources to other organizations or groups that serve immigrants or refugees.

A third structural dimension is that of adopting *rituals* that facilitate cultural inclusiveness. For example, there is considerable writing about multicultural services that are aware of and incorporate culturally diverse expressions of liturgy and preaching, while involving diverse people as leaders (Black 2000; Blount and Tisdale 2000; Law 2002; Liebenow 1999; Nieman and Rogers 2001). Prayer in particular can be an important ritual promoting integration, as members (newcomer and Canadian-born) are given opportunity to pray for and with each other (Foster 1998). Churches can also support immigrants towards congregational membership.

Finally, *language barriers* have been found to be a challenge in the integration of immigrants within congregations (Vaughan 2009), as well as to provoke tension and conflict (Woods 2006). One means of addressing these concerns is to offer language accommodations in multiple formats and settings. Accommodations can include using native-language speakers or interpreters within services and programming, as well as translating written promotional and educational materials into main immigrant languages (Black 2000; Siegel et al. 2003; Westhues et al. 2010).

## Processes that Facilitate Immigrant Integration

The third requirement is to create *social processes* that facilitate immigrant integration. Processes are the actions of a social system that allow for structures to be created, change or acted upon. Processes indicate how interactions should take place within a social system. The goal is to encourage processes within a system that will allow people to have a meaningful influence on the system itself (Kelly et al. 2000).

Four process dimensions can serve to advance immigrant integration within local congregations. The first dimension deals with processes that encourage progressive *leadership* including: (a) making efforts to involve immigrants in congregational leadership positions, (b) designating a person or position within the congregation whose role includes encouraging others to be more responsive to immigrants, (c) ensuring congregational leaders identify, prevent, and resolve cross-cultural conflicts, and (d) ensuring distinct budget provision for activities that respond to immigrants (Foster 1998; Olavarria et al. 2005; Siegel et al. 2003; Rosser 1998).

The second dimension deals with processes that ensure adequate *planning* is undertaken to effectively integrate immigrants within the congregation. Planning efforts can include: (a) conducting a needs assessment of immigrants in the surrounding community prior to implementing ministry programs, (b) involving immigrants in the planning of services, (c) involving immigrants in the planning of other church programs, (d) nurturing and seeking partnerships with other local groups or agencies who serve immigrants., and (e) drawing on the resources of external groups that provide advice about how to welcome and integrate immigrants (Corbin 2006; Olavarria et al. 2005).

Third are *training* processes designed to equip and support church members and leaders to overcome challenges associated with immigrant integration. Training can be carried out on the following topics: (a) the spiritual beliefs and traditions held by local immigrant groups, (b) how to deal with language barriers, (c) how to encourage healthy cross cultural dialogue and mutual understanding, and (d) how to practice cross cultural counseling and care (Lartey 2006; Law 1996; Parrett 2004; Siegel et al. 2003).

The final dimension refers to processes that encourage *reflexivity*. These processes encourage the local congregation to reflect on how well the vision of immigrant integration is being implemented and how to make improvements. Specific processes include: (a) regularly evaluating how well the church is welcoming and integrating immigrants, and (b) exploring how best to respond to concerns raised by immigrants within the church (Conde-Frazier et al. 2004; Siegel et al. 2003).

## Methodology

### Research Design and Approach

The survey of urban church congregations was one method in a national multi-method, multi-site research study carried out by the Centre for Community Based

Research in partnership with World Vision and the Tyndale Intercultural Ministry Centre (Janzen et al. 2010b). The purpose of the study was twofold: (a) to explore how and to what extent Canadian urban congregations are welcoming and including recent immigrants in their church-life, and (b) to determine the strategies and structures that would better facilitate the active participation of recent immigrants within Canadian churches. The survey method was designed to provide breadth of information to supplement the in-depth opinion gained from the study's other qualitative methods (i.e., focus groups, key informant interviews, document review) (Patton 2002).

The study used a participatory action research (PAR) approach which can be defined as an “approach that involves active participation of stakeholders, those whose lives are affected by the issue being studied, in all phases of research for the purpose of producing useful results to make positive changes” (Nelson et al. 1998, p. 12). A stakeholder advisory committee of interdenominational church leaders (both Canadian-born and immigrant) guided all stages of the research study, including the survey design, sampling and distribution, analysis and dissemination. Community forums were held in three study sites (Hamilton, Toronto, and Vancouver) where study findings (including survey data) were presented, discussed and verified. The use of a PAR approach enabled power-sharing among researchers and congregational leaders, both in terms of sharing control of the study design and implementation, as well as in sharing future action (Ochocka et al. 2002).

### Research Questions and Definitions

In keeping with the overall study purpose, the survey sought to answer three main research questions: (a) To what extent are Canadian urban congregations presently utilizing their vision, structures and processes to facilitate the integration of immigrants?, (b) What are the successes and challenges that Canadian urban congregations experience when attempting to integrate immigrants into the life of their congregation?, and (c) What suggestions do Canadian urban congregational leaders have to better facilitate the integration of immigrants within Christian congregations?

For this survey Christian congregations were defined as a distinct group of Christians who regularly gather together at a designated location for worship services, promotion of religious beliefs and ministry (adapted from McGrew and Cnaan 2006; Van Pelt et al. 2008). Urban congregations were operationalized to mean those churches located in one of Canada's nine urban centers (i.e., Census Metropolitan Areas) having an immigrant population above the national average of 20% (in rank order: Toronto, Vancouver, Abbotsford, Calgary, Hamilton, Windsor, Kitchener, Montreal, Guelph). Combined, these urban centers represent 43% of Canada's total population, and 74% of all immigrants in the country (Statistics Canada 2006). Narrowing the focus to these centers with a high proportion of immigrants was believed to target those church congregations most likely to be grappling with issues of immigrant integration.

## Data Collection Instrument

An online survey was developed because it is cost effective relative to other data collection methods (Yun and Trumbo 2000), has quick turnaround time, eliminates tedious mail processes, and is environmentally friendly (Tse 1998). The survey was developed using web-based software (SurveyMonkey.com) in both English and French. The study was approved by the Research Ethics Board at Wilfrid Laurier University, and a decision to respond to the invitation to participate was understood to be consent to participate. After being pilot tested by advisory committee members, an invitation to participate in the study was disseminated by email to churches in April–June 2010.

Questions on the survey were grouped into six sections: demographics, vision for immigrant integration, structures that facilitate immigrant integration, processes that facilitate immigrant integration, success and challenges, and future directions. The vision, structure, and process sections addressed the first main research question and followed the system change dimensions and performance metrics as developed through the literature review and refined by the project advisory committee (see Table 1). Consistent with Westhues et al. (2010), respondents were asked to choose on a three-point scale (always/generally done; occasionally done; seldom/never done; don't know/not applicable) for each of the 43 items in these three sections. Respondents were also invited to write illustrative examples of what their congregation had done within each of these sections. The section on successes and challenges addressed the second main research question and included two closed-ended questions (adapted from Vaughan 2009) about the degree to which newcomers were welcomed and integrated into church life (strongly agree to strongly disagree on a four point scale). Three additional open-ended questions were also included (main successes, impacts and barriers/challenges to integration). The final section on future directions addressed the third main research question and included two open-ended questions about what would help churches overcome their barriers and challenges, and their main lessons to be shared with other congregations in Canada.

## Sample

Given the often informal, fluid and varied nature of church congregations, compiling a complete email list of Canadian urban congregations is a challenge if not impossible. For example, McGrew and Cnaan (2006) found that only 58% of their eventual list of church congregations in Philadelphia came from public listings (i.e., telephone book, property tax lists). The remaining “hidden population” of congregations was sought through a variety of costly and time-consuming snowball sampling techniques. In our study, advisory committee members pointed out that common listings of congregations (e.g., denominational and umbrella organizations, telephone books) would not include the many informal and emerging church congregations that are often at the forefront of reaching out to recent immigrant communities. In addition, the recent trend away from strong denominational affiliation among many evangelical congregations (Rick Hiemstra 2010. Personal



**Table 1** Systems change framework for churches integrating immigrants

Requirement	Components	Goal	Immigrant integration dimensions	Immigrant integration performance metrics
Vision: direction that articulates the kind of social system that is now to be desired	Opinions, theories and policies about the underlying principles that should guide system behaviour and what resources are to be viewed as valuable	Shape attitudes, values, and beliefs in such a way that represents a shift in system norms	Intentionality of integration (being intentional)	Integration culture and mission Integration teaching and preaching Encourage constructive dialogue Recognize benefits of cultural diversity Opportunity to exercise spiritual gifts Opportunity for church health and growth otherwise not available
			Identification of resources that come from integration (recognizing benefits and opportunities)	Culture-oriented (belonging and participation) Power-oriented (equity and self-determination)
			Articulation of principles and values to guide integration (promoting principles and values)	Intersection of culture and power (reciprocal relationships)

Table 1 continued

Requirement	Components	Goal	Immigrant integration dimensions	Immigrant integration performance metrics
Structure: elements that facilitate opportunity for improved interactions	Settings, procedures and events that provide access to resources within the social system	Better connection of people and resources within the system in ways that promote well-being	Settings and events that facilitate interaction (places and spaces)  Social and spiritual programs that facilitate interaction (ministry programs)	Nesting churches Joint worship services Friendship events Settlement and relief services Personal development programs Community development programs Systemic change activities Evangelistic outreach activities Sponsorship of immigrants/refugees Contributions to other immigrant serving groups Culturally diverse liturgy and worship Prayer for and with immigrants Membership encouragement Worship services in main languages Interpretation in services/programs Translated church materials
			Rituals that facilitate interaction (rituals)  Language that facilitate interaction (language accommodations)	

**Table 1** continued

Requirement	Components	Goal	Immigrant integration dimensions	Immigrant integration performance metrics
Process: actions that allow structures to be created, changed or acted upon	Interpersonal exchanges within and between structures that indicate how interactions should take place	Allow people to have a meaningful influence on the system itself	Leading the church in integration (leading)	Immigrants in leadership position Integration leadership position Dealing with cross-cultural conflict Budget provision for integration Needs assessment Involvement in worship/ministry planning Nurture and seek out community partnerships Draw on external resources
			Planning for integrative activities (planning)	Needs assessment Involvement in worship/ministry planning Nurture and seek out community partnerships Draw on external resources
			Training about integration (training)	Information about spiritual beliefs and traditions Dealing with language barriers
			Reflecting on integration (reflecting)	Cross cultural dialogue and understanding Pastoral counseling and care Regular reflection/evaluation Responsive to immigrant concerns

communication on January 22. Evangelical Fellowship of Canada), would limit the comprehensiveness of common listings that tend to be denominationally based.

Consistent with McGrew and Cnaan (2006), our sampling strategy involved two main strategies. Our first strategy was to begin with databases of established church congregations. The World Vision database of Canadian congregations constituted our core sample. These congregations tended to be denominationally aligned (primarily Protestant). The database was sorted to include only those 1,595 churches in the selected nine Canadian urban centers with proportionally high immigrant populations mentioned above. In an attempt to balance the Protestant leaning of the World Vision database, requests were made to distribute the survey to the respective Catholic dioceses in the study communities. Only the Montreal diocese agreed to distribute the survey to its 200 parishes.

In order to reach the hidden population of congregations not included in these databases, we supplemented the core list via two-stage snowball sampling. We began by asking advisory committee members (many of whom were church leaders with connections to diaspora churches and recently initiated churches) to distribute the survey to their own formal and informal networks. Only churches within the identified urban centers were asked to complete the survey. Examples of the larger distribution lists included those of two church associations equipping the start-up of new churches: Outreach Canada (about 2,000 congregations) and Church Planting Canada (about 700 congregations). The second stage was to send the survey with an invitation for respondents to pass along the survey to other congregational leaders within their own networks who might be interested in completing the survey. An alternative email link of the identical survey was provided to these congregations within this second sample so as to track responses separately from the World Vision/Catholic databases.

Congregations were asked to complete the survey only once in the event of cross-postings. In all cases the survey was directed to lead clergy/pastors, some of whom may have delegated responsibility to respond to another church leader or staff. The survey therefore provides a congregational self-assessment from a leader perspective rather than the perspective of a church member.

## Results

This article reports on a descriptive analysis of survey findings. As such, the results presented here should be considered a general overview with subsequent articles providing more detailed topical analysis. It begins by describing characteristics of the responding congregations, before summarizing findings according to the three main research questions.

### Description of Responding Congregations

A total of 355 congregations entered the survey with 260 completing beyond the demographic section to provide useful data. Of these, 105 (English = 86; French = 19) were from the World Vision/Catholic databases representing a

response rate of 7%. A total of 155 churches (English = 152; French = 3) responded to the second (snowball sample) survey link. Given that we have no way of determining how many congregations eventually received the invitation to complete the survey through this link, a response rate could not be calculated for this second sample frame.

Table 2 shows key demographic characteristics of the congregational sample. Participating congregations that were denominationally aligned represented a range of Christian denominations, while the sample also included the harder-to-reach non-denominationally aligned congregations. Congregations were also distributed across urban centers, generally the larger the center the higher number of respondents. Finally, congregations ranged in size and in age, again indicating that both churches that started recently and established church experiences were being captured.

Survey respondents compare reasonably well with some known demographics of Canadian urban congregations. For example, Table 2 shows that the geographic distribution of survey respondents generally corresponds with the distribution of Canadian congregations when compared with Outreach Canada's (2011) congregational research database. (Outreach Canada maintains the largest known congregational database in Canada with 23,793 congregations nation-wide and 5,608 congregations within the nine participating urban centres). Table 2 also indicates that the age of survey congregations (i.e., year established) also match reasonably well with the distribution of the congregations in the Outreach Canada database. Comparisons of congregational size were not possible given the small number of congregations who indicated attendance numbers in the Outreach Canada research database.

Survey respondents were less reflective of denominational alignment in Canada, being skewed toward a greater proportion of Protestant (particularly non-mainline) denominations. Indeed, no Orthodox congregations responded, while national census data would suggest a higher representation of Roman Catholic parishes given the role immigration is considered to have played in increasing Roman Catholic affiliation (Statistics Canada 2003). Congregations who participated in the survey also generally had higher proportions of immigrants and recent immigrants than reflected in Canada's population as a whole (20% of Canada's population being immigrant; 4% being recent immigrants arriving in the past five years). Among congregational respondents, 78% noted that over 20% of their attendees were immigrants, while 65% indicated that they had more than 5% of attendees being recent immigrants. Thirty-one per cent of the congregations said that more than half of their attendees were immigrants, while the majority of congregations (60%) stated that the number of immigrants in their congregation had increased over the past 5 years. Worship services were conducted in 34 languages other than English or French. When asked what world region recent immigrants were born in, responding congregations mentioned Asia (67% of congregations), Central America/Caribbean (43%), and Africa (42%).

In sum, survey findings cannot be seen to be representative of the full Canadian urban church experience. However, survey responses do provide novel and valuable insights into a range of urban congregations, particularly among certain Protestant denominations and those most confronted with the Canadian immigrant reality.

**Table 2** Key demographic characteristics of responding congregations

Denominational affiliation	% <sup>a</sup>	Average weekly Church attendance	% <sup>a</sup>	Location	% <sup>a</sup>	Comparison (%) <sup>b</sup>	Year established	% <sup>a</sup>	Comparison (%) <sup>c</sup>
Anglican	6	Less than 50 people	11	Metro Vancouver	19	20	1950 or before	34	22
Associated Gospel Church	4	51–100	22	Abbotsford	4	2	1951–1965	18	13
Baptist	16	101–150	13	Calgary	12	8	1966–1980	15	10
Brethren	4	151–200	15	Windsor	1	3	1981–1995	16	22
Christian and Missionary Alliance	9	201–300	9	Waterloo Region	3	5	1996–2000	8	11
Christian Reformed	5	301–500	10	Hamilton	5	7	2001–2005	4	16
Evangelical Missionary Church	2	501–750	7	Guelph	2	1	After 2005	7	6
Lutheran	2	751–1,000	4	Greater Toronto Area	36	35			
Mennonite/Brethren in Christ	9	Over 1,000	10	Greater Montreal	19	18			
Presbyterian	7								
Pentecostal	9								
Roman Catholic	9								
United Church	2								
Interdenominational/independent	6								
Other <sup>d</sup>	8								
Not indicated	6								

<sup>a</sup> Valid percent of respondents

<sup>b</sup> Comparative data from Outreach Canada's congregational research database (2011). The percentages are based on only those nine cities identified in this study

<sup>c</sup> Comparative data from Outreach Canada's congregational research database (2011). The percentages are based on only those nine cities identified in this study. Note that not all congregations indicated year established as this variable was not originally included in the database. This database is therefore skewed toward younger churches that have subsequently been added to the database in recent years

<sup>d</sup> Other includes: Calvary Chapel, Churches of Christ, Church of God, Church of the Nazarene, Église Chrétienne Évangélique, Evangelical Covenant Church, Evangelical Free, Every Nation, Fellowship of Grace Brethren Churches, Foursquare, Free Methodist Church, Partners in Harvest, The Apostolic Church in Canada, Wesleyan

## Present Status of Immigrant Integration

Table 3 summarizes self-reports of congregational leaders as to the extent to which churches were welcoming and integrating immigrants. Congregations were most active in setting a vision for immigrant integration. In particular, the promotion of principles and values towards immigrant integration tended to be always or generally done (38% of congregations). However, churches were more likely to be promoting culture-oriented values and principles (the first three questions in that dimension) than those related to power (the next three questions). Specifically, congregations were most likely to encourage members to welcome and include people around them regardless of their culture, language or race (culture-oriented) (80% of congregations reporting always or generally), and least likely to raise awareness about the power and privilege of some racial groups over others (power-oriented) (12% of congregations reporting always or generally). The dimensions of being intentional and recognizing the benefits and opportunities of immigrants were somewhat less common, with congregations tending to occasionally pursue these actions (40 and 43% of congregations respectively).

The results were less positive for structural and process changes undergone by congregations. In the words of one respondent, “our practices have not yet caught up to our values.” Typically congregations seldom or never pursued action on most structural dimensions, namely, (a) creating integrative places and spaces (40% of congregations), (b) providing ministry programs for immigrants (53% of congregations), and (c) providing language accommodations (66% of congregations). Within these dimensions there were a few specific areas in which structural changes were more likely to have occurred. However these areas required less direct involvement from congregational members. For example, congregations were more likely to make church space available to immigrant communities (passive role), provide settlement and relief services to meet immigrants’ immediate basic needs (time limited role), or contribute financial or in-kind resource to other immigrant-serving organizations (devolving role). Engaging in rituals that promoted interaction between recent immigrants and other church members (particularly supporting recent immigrants toward church membership) was the only structural dimension for which congregational leaders tended to report occasional or frequent action (80% of congregations).

Evidence that congregations were engaging in processes that promoted immigrant integration was similarly limited. Combined actions within the three process dimensions of leading (47% of congregations), planning (46% of congregations), and training (65% of congregations) all tended to be seldom or never pursued, the only exception being efforts made by congregations to include recent immigrant groups in leadership positions (39% of congregations reporting always or generally pursued). The dimension of reflection was more positive, with congregations tending to occasionally reflect on how well they were doing in welcoming and integrating immigrants (46% of congregations), and explore how best to respond to concerns raised by recent immigrants within the church (42% of congregations).

There were some significant relationships between response patterns and demographic characteristics. To begin, non-mainline congregations were more

**Table 3** Summary of responses to immigrant integration questions

Immigrant integration dimensions	Question	% (Frequency)		
		Always/ generally	Occasionally	Seldom/ never
<i>Vision for change</i>				
Being intentional	Our congregation's leaders stress that reaching out to and including recent immigrants is a part of our church culture and mission	<b>52 (131)</b>	34 (85)	14 (35)
	Our congregation receives ongoing teaching and preaching about welcoming recent immigrants into our church life	19 (45)	<b>46 (111)</b>	34 (87)
	Our congregation's leaders encourage dialogue between recent immigrants and Canadian-born in a way that leads to mutual learning and growing	38 (93)	<b>41 (102)</b>	21 (52)
	Mean %	36	<b>40</b>	23
Recognizing benefits and opportunities	Our congregation's leaders speak of the benefits that cultural diversity brings to our church congregation	41 (103)	<b>42 (106)</b>	17 (42)
	Members of our congregation are encouraged to view ministry with recent immigrants as an opportunity to exercise their spiritual gifts	35 (83)	<b>39 (93)</b>	27 (64)
	Our congregation's leaders stress that recent immigrants bring an opportunity for church health and growth that would otherwise not be available	27 (67)	<b>47 (115)</b>	25 (62)
	Mean %	34	<b>43</b>	23
Promoting principles and values	Members of our congregation are encouraged to welcome and include people around them regardless of their culture, language or race	<b>80 (201)</b>	17 (44)	4 (11)
	Members of our congregation are encouraged to reflect on their own cultural norms and assumptions and how these are similar or different to those around them	27 (68)	<b>53 (132)</b>	20 (51)
	Members of our congregation are encouraged to adapt ideas and practices from the different cultural groups around them	19 (48)	<b>44 (108)</b>	37 (91)
	Our congregation's leaders stress that it is important for recent immigrants to be given opportunity to serve and lead within the church	<b>41 (100)</b>	39 (97)	19 (47)
	Our congregation's leaders raise awareness about the power and privilege of some racial groups over others	12 (28)	29 (65)	<b>59 (132)</b>



**Table 3** continued

Immigrant integration dimensions	Question	% (Frequency)		
		Always/ generally	Occasionally	Seldom/ never
	Our congregation's leaders promote anti-racism and actively work against the structured inequalities that immigrants experience	31 (72)	<b>39 (92)</b>	31 (73)
	Recent immigrants and Canadian-born are encouraged to work collaboratively with each other in our church ministries, and to do so in such a way that the responsibilities and benefits are mutually shared	<b>57 (140)</b>	32 (78)	11 (26)
	Mean %	<b>38</b>	36	26
	<i>Structures that support change</i>			
Places and spaces	We make space available within our church building for recent immigrant communities to meet among themselves-joint worship services	<b>39 (85)</b>	27 (58)	34 (73)
	We hold joint worship services with other congregations of different cultural backgrounds	14 (31)	35 (79)	<b>52 (117)</b>
	We hold other special events that encourage the intermingling of recent immigrants and Canadian-born	28 (63)	<b>40 (91)</b>	32 (74)
	Mean %	25	34	<b>40</b>
Ministry programs	We provide settlement and relief services specifically for recent immigrants that meet their immediate basic needs (e.g., food, clothing, housing, legal)	20 (47)	<b>46 (106)</b>	34 (79)
	We provide personal development programs specifically for recent immigrants that seek to empower them to improve their physical, emotional, linguistic or social status (e.g., ESL, visitation, recreation)	26 (60)	24 (56)	<b>49 (113)</b>
	We provide community development programs related to recent immigrants that seek to renew the building blocks of a healthy, inclusive community (e.g., jobs, health care)	7 (16)	27 (59)	<b>66 (146)</b>
	We pursue systemic change activities that attempt to transform unjust political, economic, environmental or cultural systems to the specific benefit of recent immigrants	7 (15)	30 (64)	<b>63 (135)</b>
	We hold evangelistic activities that are specifically targeted for recent immigrants	15 (34)	24 (54)	<b>61 (136)</b>
	Our congregation sponsors immigrants to come to Canada, either under the refugee or family reunification class	8 (16)	22 (46)	<b>70 (145)</b>
	We contribute financial or in-kind resources to other organizations or groups that serve recent immigrants or refugees	33 (75)	<b>38 (87)</b>	28 (64)

**Table 3** continued

Immigrant integration dimensions	Question	% (Frequency)		
		Always/ generally	Occasionally	Seldom/ never
Rituals	Mean %	17	30	<b>53</b>
	We incorporate culturally diverse expressions in our worship and liturgy	19 (45)	<b>54 (127)</b>	27 (64)
	We intentionally pray for and with recent immigrants and their families	36 (85)	<b>44 (104)</b>	20 (47)
	We encourage and support recent immigrants toward membership within our church	<b>60 (140)</b>	28 (66)	11 (26)
Language accommodations	Mean %	38	<b>42</b>	19
	Worship services are conducted in the main immigrant languages served by our church	28 (59)	9 (19)	<b>63 (134)</b>
	Interpretation is provided for worship services and programs/ministries in the main immigrant languages served by our church	16 (33)	13 (27)	<b>71 (150)</b>
	Church promotional and educational material is translated in the main immigrant languages served by our church	15 (32)	20 (42)	<b>65 (137)</b>
Processes encouraging change	Mean %	19	14	<b>66</b>
	Efforts are made so that our congregation's leaders include members of the recent immigrant groups that we serve	<b>39 (85)</b>	36 (79)	25 (54)
	There is a person or position within the church whose role includes encouraging others to be more responsive to recent immigrants or cultural diversity	22 (45)	18 (38)	<b>60 (125)</b>
	Our congregation's leaders identify, prevent, and resolve cross-cultural conflicts or complaints	24 (47)	<b>41 (81)</b>	35 (69)
Planning	There is a distinct budget provision for activities that respond to recent immigrants	21 (42)	13 (26)	<b>66 (130)</b>
	Mean %	27	27	<b>47</b>
	A needs assessment has been conducted to accurately plan and implement programs/ministries that respond to recent immigrants in our community	11 (24)	24(30)	<b>65 (135)</b>
	We involve recent immigrants in the planning of our worship services and other church ministries	22 (45)	<b>39 (81)</b>	39 (80)
Leading	We nurture and seek out partnerships with other local groups or agencies who serve recent immigrants	24 (52)	36 (78)	<b>39 (84)</b>
	We draw on the resources of external groups (e.g., denominational bodies, international partnerships) that provide advice about how to welcome and integrate recent immigrants	19 (39)	<b>41 (85)</b>	40 (82)

**Table 3** continued

Immigrant integration dimensions	Question	% (Frequency)		
		Always/ generally	Occasionally	Seldom/ never
Training	Mean %	19	35	<b>46</b>
	Our church members and/or leaders receive ongoing training and support about the spiritual beliefs and traditions held by the recent immigrant groups that are apart of our congregation	10 (20)	27 (56)	<b>63 (132)</b>
	Our church members and/or leaders receive ongoing training and support about how to deal with language barriers	6 (12)	25 (52)	<b>69 (143)</b>
	Our church members and/or leaders receive ongoing training and support about how to encourage healthy cross cultural dialogue and mutual understanding	9 (19)	35 (76)	<b>56 (121)</b>
Reflecting	Our congregation's leaders receive ongoing training and support about cross cultural counseling and care	6 (12)	23 (47)	<b>72 (149)</b>
	Mean %	8	28	<b>65</b>
	We regularly reflect on how well we are doing in welcoming and integrating recent immigrants	23 (51)	<b>46 (103)</b>	32 (71)
	We make efforts to explore how best to respond to concerns raised by recent immigrants within the church	26 (57)	<b>42 (92)</b>	32 (70)
Mean %	25	<b>44</b>	32	

Bold represents highest frequencies

likely than mainline congregations (whether Roman Catholic or Protestant including Anglican, Lutheran, Presbyterian and United Church) to have high scores (i.e., generally or always done) in creating places and spaces of interaction [ $\chi^2_{(2,N=222)} = 9.6, p < 0.01$ ] and in providing language accommodations [ $\chi^2_{(2,N=208)} = 6.0, p < 0.01$ ]. In addition, newer congregations (established 1966 or later) were more likely than older congregations to be intentional in their vision for immigrant integration [ $\chi^2_{(2,N=251)} = 6.0, p < 0.05$ ], provide language accommodations [ $\chi^2_{(2,N=218)} = 19.5, p < 0.01$ ], and provide training related to immigrant integration [ $\chi^2_{(2,N=202)} = 8.3, p < 0.05$ ]. Larger congregations (over 750 weekly attendees) were more likely than smaller congregations to provide language accommodations [ $\chi^2_{(6,N=218)} = 19.5, p < 0.01$ ].

However, the demographic characteristic most strongly associated with congregational immigrant integration was the percentage of immigrant attendees. Congregations in which more than half of their attendees were immigrant were more likely than congregations with a lower proportion of immigrants to be intentional in their vision for immigrant integration [ $\chi^2_{(4,N=249)} = 10.5, p < 0.05$ ], implement rituals respectful of cultural diversity [ $\chi^2_{(4,N=237)} = 11.0, p < 0.05$ ], provide language accommodations [ $\chi^2_{(4,N=216)} = 57.7, p < 0.01$ ], provide leadership towards immigrant integration [ $\chi^2_{(4,N=185)} = 24.0, p < 0.01$ ], and provide related training opportunities [ $\chi^2_{(4,N=201)} = 13.0, p < 0.05$ ]. Congregations with fewer immigrants (i.e., less than 20% of attendees) were less likely to recognize the benefits and opportunities that immigrants bring [ $\chi^2_{(2,N=208)} = 6.0, p < 0.01$ ] than congregations with a higher proportion of immigrants. In contrast, location did not seem to matter. There were no significant differences among responses for congregations in large cities (i.e., Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver combined) compared with smaller urban centers. Moreover, no significant differences were found comparing responses from congregations in Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver separately.

### Successes and Challenges of Integrating Immigrants

Beyond responding to closed-ended questions, participants also wrote a great deal about their experience of integrating immigrants, often passionately so. These qualitative responses gave rich insights into the diversity of how churches were responding to the immigrant reality. They also illustrated the great variety of church settings within which such a response occurred. For example, in addition to more traditional congregational formats, some congregations were experimenting with multi-site locations and a variety of multi-ethnic configurations. Despite this diversity, a number of main themes emerged.

Regarding successes, it was congregations who were most active in attempting to integrate immigrants that provided the greatest insight. In particular, congregations in which immigrants were the clear majority often described their success in terms of spontaneously responding to immigrants as a natural progression of who they were, rather than as a planned set of targeted activities. For these respondents, the survey distinction between immigrant and host Canadian seemed irrelevant.

“Ministry with immigrants” is not something we think about. We are the immigrants. When we encourage our people to invite their neighbours to [a church event] that is going to be a cross cultural activity, we don’t focus on the immigrant population. We focus on our neighbours who are from other places.

On a similar note, and the success most frequently mentioned by respondents, was the *informal and relational* way that congregations interacted with immigrants. Church leaders spoke about the importance of developing friendships with newcomers and responding to the needs of immigrant as they naturally emerged. Relationship building was aided by organizing social, recreational and “friendship” events (particularly those involving food), as well as holding cultural celebrations. Other mechanisms included placing recent immigrants within smaller gatherings of church members who meet regularly for support, prayer and study, or intentionally connecting immigrants to other individuals who share affinity of culture, language or common interest. Often respondents noted that this relational emphasis applied not only to immigrants, but to all people without distinction. One respondent articulated it this way: “Authentic love and caring creates relationships that create community—this is the premise we work on for everyone, not just recent immigrants.” Another stated:

We try to integrate [immigrants] quickly, give them an immediate sense of belonging. Food has no language barrier and everyone is always willing to [join in] fellowship over a meal. It is important that they develop a close contact not necessarily with [church] leadership but [with] someone who shares common interests with them.

Other successes included more *formalized activities and supports*. For example, respondents spoke of making intentional efforts to encourage recent immigrant involvement in a variety of church activities, most notably in formal leadership positions (whether clergy or lay) and in worship services. In addition, churches offered a range of programs and services to meet immigrant needs. While English language programming was the most common program stated (e.g., formal ESL classes, conversational circles, reading clubs, Bible studies), other programs were also developed to meet practical settlement needs, or to engage in systemic advocacy aimed at altering government policies. Other respondents spoke of sponsoring refugees or supporting refugee claimants in seeking immigration status.

A final success theme related to a *new openness within the congregation*. In part this openness related to churches being more willing to allow immigrants to be active in church-life (“We are now more open to new Canadians praying and reading scripture in their mother tongue”). In part the openness related to a new level of awareness that church members gained (e.g., awareness of cultural differences, of the immigration system, of immigrant supports available in the community). But most notable was a new openness to seeing the positive impacts that immigrants had made on their congregation. Respondents used words such as “blessing”, “richness”, “joy inducing”, “freshness in adding new ideas”, and “new life” to describe the benefits that immigrants brought. Others spoke of how their

relationships with immigrants helped them to be “more outward looking” and “less self-centered”, including a renewed interest in overseas mission.

Our understanding of the gospel and of ourselves has greatly improved because of the relationships that we have built with immigrants.

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

Not all survey respondents had such a positive experience with integrating immigrants. In fact, the main challenge that churches encountered was quite the opposite to the new openness described above. A number of respondents frankly described a culture of resistance among their church members to adapt and change. “Inflexible and culturally unaware” was how one church leader described it. Another stated: “We are still fairly ethno-centric. The desire is there [to integrate immigrants] but sometimes it seems like we still want newcomers to be like us.” Still others noted that changing a congregation to be more welcoming of immigrants was a painful process that required personal sacrifice and a willingness to overcome prejudices.

Biggest challenge is not recognizing our own cultural assumptions and how they impact on us.

For those congregations that had begun the process of becoming more responsive to immigrants, there was another challenge. Survey respondents frequently noted a lack of depth of response to the needs of immigrants. While the congregation might initially have welcomed immigrants, the longer-term work of fully integrating immigrants was often reported to be lacking. “We’ve been welcoming well,” said one respondent, “but taking that to ‘the next level’ and connecting them to meaningful life in the body [of the church] has been a struggle.” Quantitative responses reinforced this point. Sixty percent of respondents strongly agreed that people who recently came to Canada generally received a warm welcome by member of their congregation. Only 32% strongly agreed that recent immigrants were generally integrated well into the life of the congregation.

There were a number of factors behind this shallow and unsustainable response. To begin, there was a recognition of the extra time and effort that was needed to do the hard work of adapting and changing to society’s increasingly diverse immigrant reality. Working to overcome language barriers was the most frequently mentioned, while other efforts focused on overcoming cultural differences (in leadership style, theology, worship, preaching, pastoral care, etc.), and on meeting the many practical settlement needs of immigrants and refugees. Other factors included the mobility of immigrants (i.e., immigrants who stayed only a short while within a particular congregation before moving on to other congregations or cities), and balancing the accommodation of multiple cultures within a single congregation.

Our parish receives individuals and families from a large diversity of countries and cultures. Hence it is very difficult to orient programs or liturgies to

specific group(s) due to a lack of resources and a concern regarding the showing of favoritism.

A final factor limiting the depth of immigrant response was a lack of relational emphasis. Some respondents noted that it was often easier to create formal programs to meet the needs of immigrants than it was to simply develop personal (and hence deeper) relationships with them. In part this relational limitation was a matter of leadership, with leaders needing to better model this personal relational emphasis. But it was also a matter of a congregation that valued inclusive community. While it might be relatively easy to welcome recent immigrants to a Sunday worship service, it was quite another thing to reciprocally share life together throughout the week.

[There is a] long-term difficulty in [making] personal connections across cultural barriers. Worship together is relatively easy. Spending time together outside worship is limited to serving them, rather than serving together or life together.

### Suggestions for Better Integrating Immigrants

Many respondents recognized that they could (even should) do better at integrating recent immigrants into their congregation. Yet many acknowledged that they were still struggling as to how to do this. In the words of one congregational leader: “We are just starting to do this [immigrant integration] intentionally. We need help.” There were four main suggestions that respondents offered that would help them meet their challenges in welcoming and integrating recent immigrants.

Having access to *formal training and other educational resources* was the most common suggestion. At a general level, respondents called for training that instilled a greater awareness of the need for congregations (and denominations) to better respond to the immigrant reality. But more specifically, respondents offered a range of topics for training, including cross cultural awareness and intelligence, overcoming language barriers, Canadian immigration system, cross cultural pastoral care, legal aspects of immigration, connecting with people of other faiths, changing programs and structures from monoculture to intercultural, leadership models for diverse communities, making room for new relationships, building bridges with ethnic communities, and theological underpinnings. A variety of tools and formats were suggested, including training classes and seminars, teaching and preaching within worship services (including pulpit sharing with immigrant ministers), written case studies of best practices, and mentoring or coaching opportunities. Target audiences included church members and ministry volunteers as well as church leaders, including training for immigrants to become leaders. Finally, respondents also called for better awareness of existing external educational and training resources including resources from denominational bodies.

A second suggestion focused on the congregation itself becoming more *intentional*. Most often this suggestion was given in the context of church leadership. “I think leaders need to be alerted of the growing reality [of immigrants] in our city,” said one respondent, “and [then] re-orient the goals of the church to actually consider responding to recent immigrants more intentionally.” Intentionality could also be

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

A third suggestion was to foster the *relational emphasis* that many congregations had previously spoken of as their greatest success. “Be human!” was how one respondent summed up what was needed. Specific suggestions revolved around better connecting recent immigrants with other church members, having more social events, celebrating cultural diversity more frequently, and more deliberately building cross-cultural friendships. Other suggestions focused on encouraging cross-cultural dialogue, as expressed by this respondent:

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

A final suggestion centered on the need for congregations not to act alone in their efforts to welcome and integrate recent immigrants. Respondents called for churches to develop new or stronger *partnerships* with other churches, immigrant-serving organizations and the government.

[We need] to be more integrated within the community network—churches, community centers and the city social workers—to use our strengths together.

## Discussion

This study introduced a comprehensive strategy for measuring immigrant integration within the context of local church congregations. In addition, the results of this survey provided first-time (baseline) insights into how a range of urban Christian congregations from across Canada are presently responding to the Canadian immigrant reality. Both of these contributions are briefly discussed below.

Regarding metrics, the survey’s system’s change perspective provided a useful framework for measuring immigrant integration within church congregations, potentially for other settings as well. Such a perspective widened the more narrow organizational theory (i.e., congregations as a closed system) discourse found in existing multicultural church literature (e.g., Yancey 2003; Foster 1998). It did so by considering how congregations respond to a dynamic open system through promoting vision, structures and processes that facilitate immigrant integration. This systems change perspective is not only consistent within emerging immigration integration literature (e.g., Grantmakers Concerned with Immigrants and Refugees 2006; Tolley 2004), but is also in keeping with broader contemporary theological trends that view local congregations within the context of their surrounding society (Eiesland and Warner 2006; Guder 1998; Van Gelder 2008).

Systems change perspectives frequently make mention of the need for structures and processes to be altered in order to support systems change (e.g., Kelly 2006; Kelly et al. 2000). Visionary leadership that articulates the kind of social system that



is to be desired is less frequently discussed. We decided to foreground vision in our survey as an equal requirement for congregations. This decision was affirmed by the many qualitative survey responses emphasizing the importance of visionary leadership in helping congregations to adapt to their increasingly multicultural context. The decision also led us to be sensitized to the nuanced role of visionary leadership in promoting immigrant integration. Moreover, elevating visionary leadership as a primary change requirement acknowledged the important role that value-driven inspiration plays in moving congregations forward; a role particularly cherished within Christian congregations (Van Gelder 2008).

Two limitations were uncovered within our survey metrics. First, the relational and informal elements of immigrant integration emphasized in qualitative responses unveiled an underdeveloped area within our survey. In particular the structural dimension of “places and spaces” (i.e., settings and events that facilitate interaction) and the vision dimension of “principles and values” could be expanded to include additional questions. Example questions could include: holding cross cultural celebration events, incorporating recent immigrants into smaller group settings, and intentionally connecting recent immigrants with other church members. Similarly, a vision question could be added about encouraging authentic friendships with newcomers as a means of encouraging reciprocal relationships. Second, and in an effort to increase the relevance of the survey to immigrant-majority congregations, the occasional contrast within the survey between recent immigrants and Canadian-born could be eliminated. In its place reference could be made to contrast recent immigrants with “others in the congregation”. Despite these limitations, respondents were generally responsive to survey questions.

Regarding baseline insights, survey findings generally revealed that participating Canadian churches were beginning to do the work of welcoming and integrating recent immigrants into their church life. This was particularly true of congregations that had a majority of immigrant attendees. The critical mass of immigrants seems to nudge these congregations toward being more responsive along a number of dimensions. To a lesser extent newer congregations (i.e., established after 1965) and non-mainline congregations were also more responsive along a few dimensions. Reimer and Wilkinson (2010) have found that 19% of Canadian evangelical churches they studied were multi-racial as compared to 8% of churches in the United States. In addition, these congregations have been found to adopt more flexible structures and processes; qualities enabling the congregations to be more adaptive to a changing context. On example is the willingness of the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada (PAOC) to allow immigrant Pentecostals to affiliate with both the PAOC and with churches in their home countries—an arrangement that had previously been resisted (Wilkinson 2006).

However, the urban church response to date has generally not been holistically undertaken and lacks depth. While the generalizability of the findings is limited, it appears that there is considerable room for congregations in Canada to deepen their response, especially considering that the sample was skewed towards congregations most likely to be responding to the immigrant reality. This room for growth suggests that Christian churches appear no further ahead, and in fact may be lagging behind, when compared to other sectors in society. For example, within the mental health

field, Westhues et al. (2010) found that the bulk of mental health organizations across the province of Ontario were aware of culturally responsive practice and a majority had at least begun to take them up.

Survey findings also suggest that vision leads the way in congregational change. If only structure and process dimensions had been considered in the closed-ended questions, it would have appeared that congregations were very limited in welcoming and integrating immigrants. While visionary leadership may be only a starting point, findings suggest that this is an important starting point—providing the foundational basis to theologically ground, inspire, and model the desired congregational change. This assertion is supported by findings of the Westhues et al. (2010) study above which found that mental health organizations promoting service philosophies that valued cultural responsiveness (i.e., promoted a vision for serving immigrants) were significantly more likely to be engaged in culturally responsive practice than those that did not.

Still vision can take many forms. For example, within the existing church literature there are three main models put forward as to the preferred outcome for churches grappling with cultural diversity, whether monocultural, intercultural or something in between (e.g., Sheffield 2005). Our findings provided examples of all three of these general models in action. Or consider differences in the guiding principles and values supporting a congregation's vision for change. While some have claimed that effective organizational change must be framed in terms of power differences between those from the mainstream and racialized minorities (e.g., McKenzie and Harpham 2006), our survey findings revealed that culture-oriented values were much more commonly advanced within congregations as opposed to such power-orientated ones. The important point here is to recognize that the kind of new structures and processes being implemented may well depend on the type and philosophy of vision being promoted. It may be that individual local congregations may not necessarily need to pursue all actions as outlined in our survey framework, but only those that best match the unique direction as articulated within their local church vision (Naylor 2007). Further research is needed to better understand how structural changes and processes can best be tailored to meet these nuanced differences in vision.

A final point relates to the emphasis of survey findings on the need for informal and relationship-oriented interactions between immigrants and other church members. Contrast this orientation with previous investigations into multicultural organizational change that have tended to favor elements of formalized services and supports as the primary indicators of cultural responsiveness (e.g., Olavarria et al. 2005; Siegel et al. 2003; Westhues et al. 2010). By highlighting the relational elements, survey findings point out that church congregations are also characterized by the informality of community life, as distinct from the highly professionalized nature of human service organizations. Perhaps our survey would have found more evidence of structural change had the relationally-based closed-ended questions suggested in the previous section been included in the survey. And yet qualitative responses also noted that many churches were struggling to expand their efforts beyond the more formal rituals and programs that their congregation offered. In any

case, more research is necessary to explore these informal and relational expressions of immigrant integration within church congregations.

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