



Finding  
Our Way

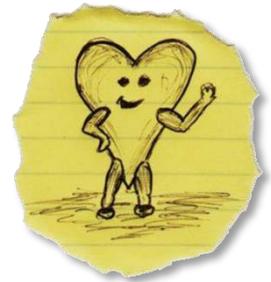
# Immigrants, Refugees, and Canadian Churches

An Interdenominational Guide to Action  
Spring 2015

# Welcome!

By picking up this Guide to Action, you are joining an energizing and momentous Canada-wide project as it moves from research to mobilization. The project name – *The Role of Churches in Immigrant Settlement and Integration* – points toward the roles that churches currently have, as well as the roles that churches will take on in the future. You can be part of this project!

In the first year of the project, we conducted one-on-one interviews, held focus groups, distributed surveys, and compiled case studies about how Canadian churches currently are working with recent immigrants and refugees. We spoke with local and national church leaders and church members, both immigrant and Canadian-born. We heard what they were saying about what lies at the heart of church ministry with newcomers to Canada. Their ideas informed the writing of this Guide, and their direct voices are captured in the quotations throughout.



Overall, the first year revealed contrasting themes including *celebration* (e.g. we are well-involved... we are more aware of the needs of others), *lament* (e.g. we are not doing enough... we do not seem willing to change based on our relationships with immigrants and refugees), and *readiness* (e.g. we are ready to re-train our leaders... we want to learn from other churches).

Consider this Guide to Action to be your invitation to build on what we learned in the first year of research. **This Guide is for congregational leaders and congregational members. It's for immigrants, refugees, and Canadian-born alike.** As the title of this Guide suggests, we invite you all to join us in “finding our way” together. The Guide is organized into four sections designed to explore the following questions:

- 1 Where are we?
- 2 Why should we get involved?
- 3 What could we do?
- 4 How can we learn from one another?

“I see **signs of hope** in that we are acknowledging that at least in Christian terms, the next generation of church probably does not look like us.”

-Church leader

**Finding our way** connects with the lived reality of recent immigrants and refugees. Think of a phrase like “they found their way to Canada” as you think about an individual refugee or an immigrant family you know. What were the obstacles that made “finding their way” difficult? What were the factors that eased their arrival in Canada? Once an individual or a family arrives in Canada, what are the everyday realities that help or hinder their initial settlement or their longer term integration into their new homeland?

**Finding our way** connects with the reality of churches in Canada today. In just one generation the communities around our churches have become so much more diverse. And immigration trends are projected to only continue this transformation. Whether your church is made up of immigrants and refugees, of Canadian-born, or a mixture of both, we all need to re-discover the calling of what it means to be a faithful church within our rapidly changing communities.

**Finding our way** also connects with the reality of biblical narrative. Think of the Exodus story when God leads the people out of slavery: “The Lord went in front of them in a pillar of cloud by day, to lead them along the Way, and in a pillar of fire by night, to give them light so that they might travel by day and by night” (*Exodus 13:21*). In the first few centuries after Jesus, the earliest forms of church consisted of Christians living together in a certain style, manner, or “way” that they believed was most faithful to the

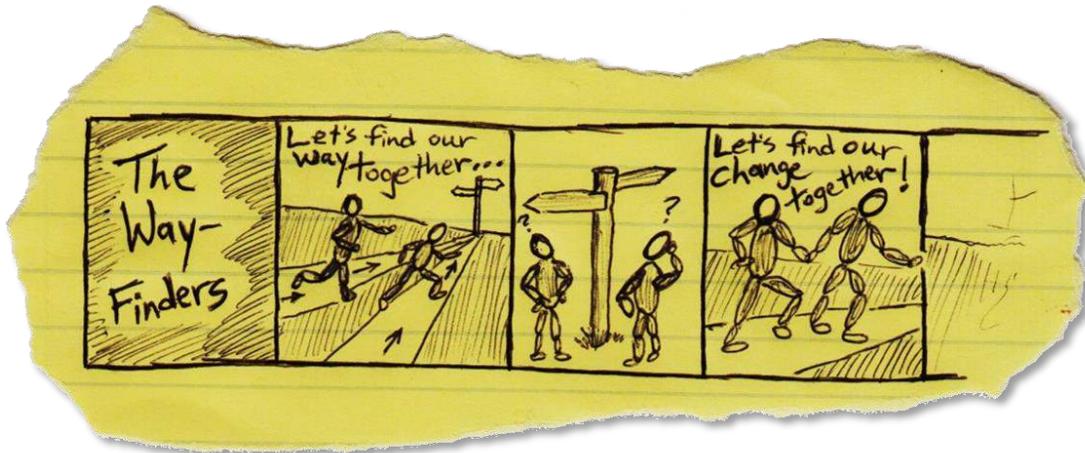


teachings of Jesus. In fact, people referred to members of the early church as members of “the Way” (*Acts chapters 9, 19, and 24*).

In the following pages, we hope to bring together these three realities. We do this by offering some concrete ways for you to “be the church” and to “do the work of the church”. For simplicity, we refer to all these ways as “wayfinding actions” even though the word “action” sometimes doesn’t capture the fact that being a certain way can be just as powerful (or more powerful) than acting in a certain way. “Finding our way” says something both about our future destination, as well as the manner in which we move toward our destination.

A word of warning. Digging deeper into this Guide to Action might make you and your congregation feel somewhat unsettled at first. And it might eventually lead you to change what you think and do. That comes with the territory of being people of welcome. When we welcome new people into our home, not many of us would want our welcome to sound like this: “Welcome to my house. Now we expect you to think and act just like us.” Instead, most Christians want their welcome to sound more like, “Welcome! I know we may be different but we are all created by God. I would like to share what’s important in my life with you, and I hope you feel free to do the same.” Encounters like this leave both us and our new friends enriched - even changed.

**“I think the church can do something that nobody else can do, and that’s providing accompaniment, providing that sense of community, of friendship, which community agencies have a really difficult time doing.”**  
*-Church leader*



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## Acknowledgements

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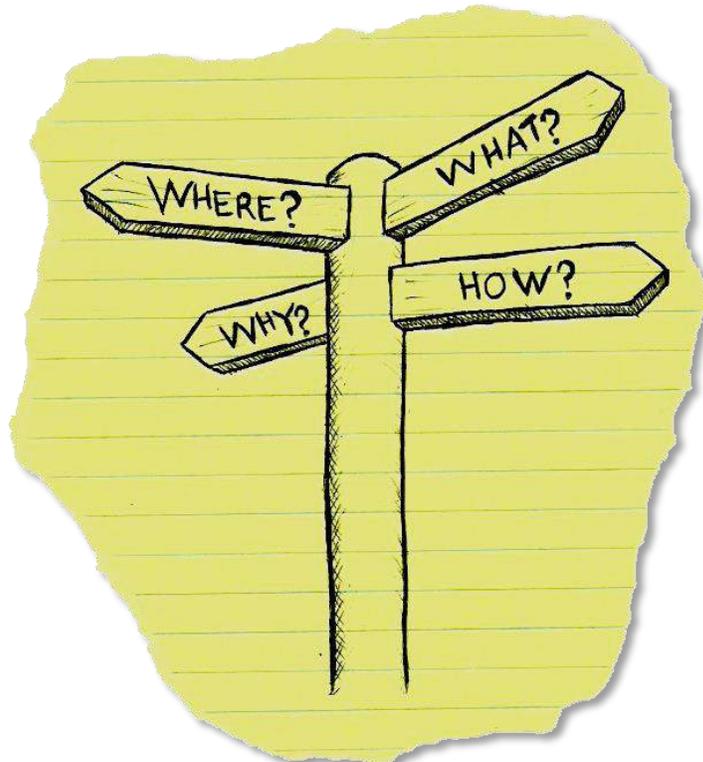


Centre for Community Based Research (CCBR)  
73 King Street West, Suite 300, Kitchener, Ontario N2G 1A7  
Phone: (519) 741-1318 Fax: (519) 741-8262



# Table of Contents

<b>Welcome</b> .....	i
<b>Section 1: Where Are We?</b> .....	1
<b>Section 2: Why Should We Get Involved?</b> .....	4
<b>Section 3: What Could We Do?</b> .....	9
<b>Section 4: How Can We Learn From Each Other?</b> .....	16
<b>Wayfinding Actions</b>	
Re-orient Yourselfs .....	3
Write a Formal Statement to Work With Newcomers .....	7
Organize a Book or Bible Study .....	8
Visit Another Church or Community Agency .....	8
Invite a Newcomer For Dinner At Your Home .....	10
Create Your Own Program .....	13
Sponsor a Refugee Family .....	15
Host an Intercultural Workshop .....	17
Initiate a Community-Based Arts Project .....	18
Consider Offering "Sanctuary" .....	19
Tie a String Around Your Finger .....	20
<b>Definitions</b> .....	22
<b>Resources</b> .....	23
<b>Endnotes</b> .....	26



# SECTION 1

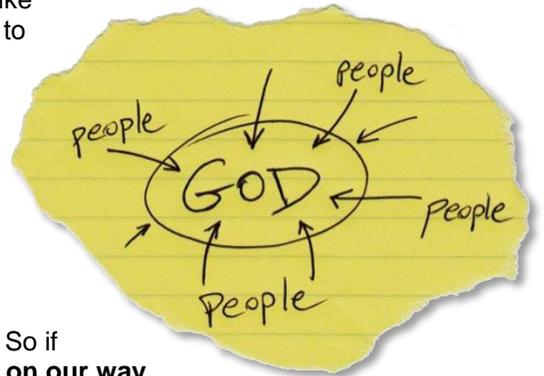
## Where Are We?

The image below is one way of thinking about where we are as Canadian churches in terms of immigrant and refugee ministry – obviously, **we are at different places and stages, doing different things**. The reality is that there are various ways of doing ministry with recent immigrants and refugees, all of which are important. From small-scale, very local initiatives to the nation-wide work of advocacy, and from personal relationship-building and faith sharing to collective community development, God calls us to a wide variety of ways of “doing” and “being”. Some of these different ways will be reflected throughout this Guide to Action.



Even though we are all in different places – both geographically and figuratively – what if we are all heading in somewhat the same direction or “way”? What if we are engaged in various “wayfinding activities” that lead us toward the same world of welcome and inclusiveness? Moreover, how do we understand our own Christian way and the church’s mandate to “make disciples” in relation to all the other ways or paths followed by other religious traditions? What does Christian wayfinding have to do with the work of our Canadian government? As people of faith, how do we make sense of “seeking the peace of the city” (*Jer. 29:7*) or “loving our neighbour” (*Matt. 22:39*) alongside secular understandings of justice, multiculturalism, or immigrant settlement and integration? We encourage you to reflect on these questions as you work through the materials in this Guide to Action.

Here is one other image to consider as you get oriented within the Guide to Action. A sixth-century Christian monk by the name of Dorotheus of Gaza once offered the following words: "Imagine that the world is a circle, that God is the center, and that the radial lines, like spokes, are people's different ways of life. When those who wish to come closer to God walk towards the center of the circle, they come closer to one another at the same time as they approach God. The closer they come to God, the closer they come to one another. And the closer they come to one another, the closer they come to God."



According to this way of looking at the world, all people bear God's image and God's presence is active everywhere including within all cultures. How we relate and approach one another becomes an expressions of how we relate to and approach God. So if the question is, "Where are we?" then we might answer, **"We are on our way toward God, and we are on our way to becoming closer with other people."**

Where are you? Get some people together and reflect on where your church is located within the "world of welcome". Perhaps you are in the initial stages of conversation about working with immigrants and refugees. Perhaps you have just started to get involved, or perhaps you have been doing work in this area for many years. Think about your home community, how it is changing with the arrival of immigrant and refugee families, and consider where your church sees itself in relation to these newcomers.

### Prayer for a World of Welcome

Loving God, yours was the world of welcome.  
The world of all peoples and all goodness welcome.  
What went wrong? Where is that world now?  
When we are anxious about newcomers in our land,  
We pray for your welcome to fill us with grace.  
When we only seem comfortable with the way we've always done it,  
We pray for your welcome to fill us with creativity.  
When we look around and only see faces like our own,  
We pray for your welcome to expand our community.  
When we wonder about the stranger, the orphan, and the widow,  
We pray for your welcome to nudge us toward real-life relationships.  
Loving God, yours is the world of welcome.  
With your blessing, help us to live in that world.  
With your creative power, help us to live out that world. AMEN.

# Wayfinding Action

## RE-ORIENT YOURSELVES

No matter how much or how little your church community has been involved with refugee and immigrant ministry, it's helpful to re-orient yourselves from time-to-time. **Re-orientation can give a**

**sense of renewed purpose**, it can inform your ministry with new insights or recent statistics, and it can provide the basis for charting a course into the future.

Since we're talking about "wayfinding" – not only for immigrants and refugees, but for Canadian-born folks as well – a re-orientation exercise involving maps can be very impactful. We use maps to locate ourselves in the present. We use maps to show where we have been in the past, or where we plan to travel in the future. We also use maps to learn other kinds of information.

- 1) Convene one or more small groups from your church, and then select several of the following maps as the basis for the re-orientation exercise:
  - a. [Map of the Refugee Highway](#)
  - b. [Map of Places of Birth of Recent Refugees](#)
  - c. [Map of the Destinations of Refugees](#)
  - d. [Map of the Origins of Refugees](#)
  - e. [Map of the Homelands and Homes of New Canadian Immigrants](#)
  - f. A map of your local community

- 2) After an opening devotional, use a data projector to view each map on a screen.

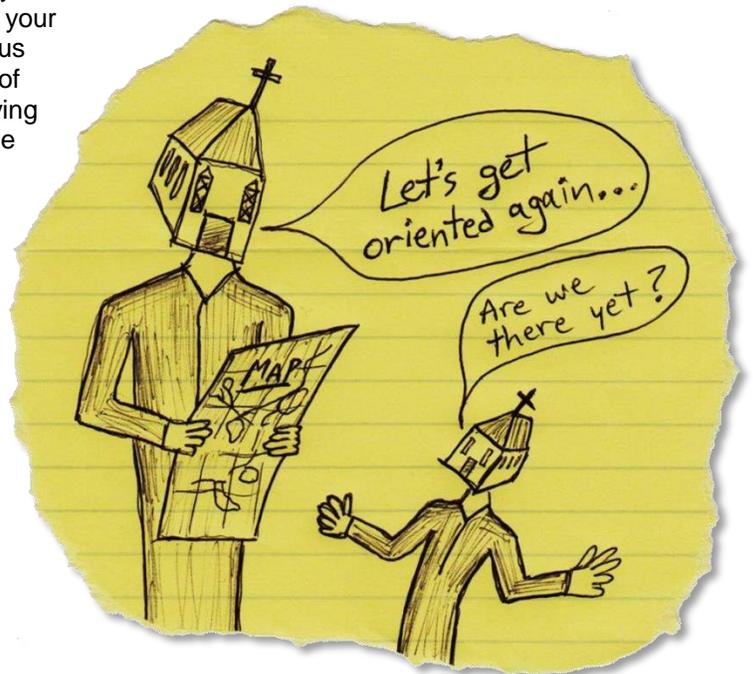
- 3) Generate discussion questions to accompany each map. For example, when viewing the map of your local community, talk about cultural or religious diversity in the area. When viewing the map of the "refugee highway", talk about the underlying causes of displacement in various parts of the world.

- 4) To include a personal component, several people could share their own stories that relate to one or more of the maps. For example, someone might tell about their journey to Canada as an immigrant, and they could use one of the maps as a visual aid.

- 5) As an option, the whole event could be organized in "show-and-tell" fashion, with each map presented by someone who has come with stories, questions, or insights that are significant for them.

- 6) Finally, if time and inclination allow, consider ending the exercise with a creative component that might be

called "Cartographers-R-Us". Using large sheets of paper or a digital smartboard, lead participants in creating a map from scratch. The map could depict where your church is in relation to various community agencies and resources (see Asset-mapping exercise on page 55) or it could go in a more symbolic direction by depicting how refugee and immigrant ministry fits into the larger "landscape" of Christian ministry



# SECTION 2

## Why Should We Get Involved?

The picture below is a representation of how churches in Canada often see the needs of newcomers around them and yet somehow seem distant to meet those needs. Some may ask, **“Why should we, the church, get involved with immigrants and refugees in the first place? Do we have a responsibility to help immigrants and refugees? If the government has services to help newcomers, is there even a need for churches in Canada to assist immigrants and refugees?”**

We can look at statistics to help answer these questions: one out of five people in Canada's population is foreign born, which accounts for more than 20% of the total population. Over the last few decades newcomers have become increasingly diverse, coming in larger numbers from diverse world regions.<sup>i</sup> By 2031, the number foreign born is projected to steadily increase another 10% to 30%.<sup>ii</sup> Without a doubt, the immigrant population is both growing and diversifying.



Our churches can intentionally address this growth and diversification by developing a vision to strategically work with recent immigrants and refugees. Even though the Canadian government provides services to help newcomers, there are gaps in which the church can play an important role. Vision helps us be effective and successful in this task. Unfortunately, we often fail to develop a clear vision which incorporates the cultural and religious diversity within the neighbourhoods, towns, or cities where we minister and serve.

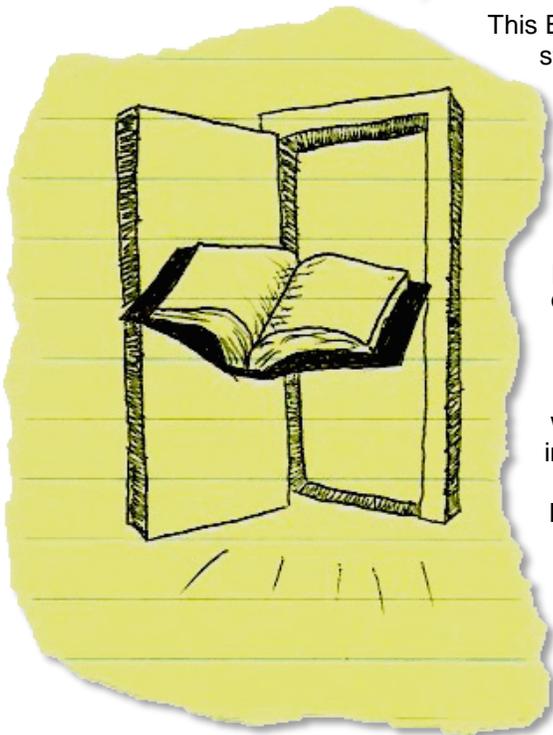
**Vision is the motivation that provides direction for us as churches to get involved in supporting immigrant settlement and integration.** As we set out to envision a strategy for working with recent immigrants and refugees, let us keep in mind two major motivating factors for churches:

- 1) A Biblical and theological mandate to welcome the stranger.
- 2) A desire to connect to people's common humanity.

## **Biblical and Theological Mandate to Welcome the Stranger**

Scripture is essential for informing and building faith and desire within our churches to be faithful to the Biblical narrative as a whole. There is such a strong resonance between the plight of Biblical migrants such as Abraham, Moses, and Jesus, and of those recent immigrants and refugees found throughout our country today. They all have journeyed across countries for multiple reasons and experienced cultures foreign to them. Leviticus 19:33-34 says "When an alien lives with you in your land, do not mistreat the alien. The alien living with you must be treated as one of your native-born. Love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in Egypt. I am the Lord your God."

**"When an alien lives with you in your land, do not mistreat the alien. The alien living with you must be treated as one of your native-born. Love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in Egypt. I am the Lord your God."**  
*-Leviticus 19:33-34*



This Biblical passage is a strong encouragement for our churches to be inclusive of all people in our country. Many of us, individuals and churches, can identify with this Biblical theme of migration which encourages us to treat newcomers with the same love and dignity that we would want to be treated ourselves.

Our churches can also be motivated by other scriptural passages towards a desire to be faithful to specific exhortations such as welcoming the stranger, loving one's neighbour, helping those in need (including the "poor" and "orphan"), and sharing the gospel message with all people. These passages tend to direct and lead us in our daily lives as well as direct the vision of a church's engagement with immigrants and refugees.

Initiatives such as evangelism, church revitalization and increasing participant engagement are also motivations for serving newcomers. Embracing recent immigrants and refugees into our churches can often lead to genuine energy and enthusiasm—a sort of new life blood for faithful Christian living within our churches and our Canadian cultural context.

## Connect to People's Common Humanity

Jesus summed the entire Old Testament law in Matthew 22:37-40 with two commandments, saying, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it: "You shall love your neighbour as yourself." Working and serving newcomers is much like Jesus' command. By loving them as ourselves, we are connecting to people at a very root level—our shared common humanity.

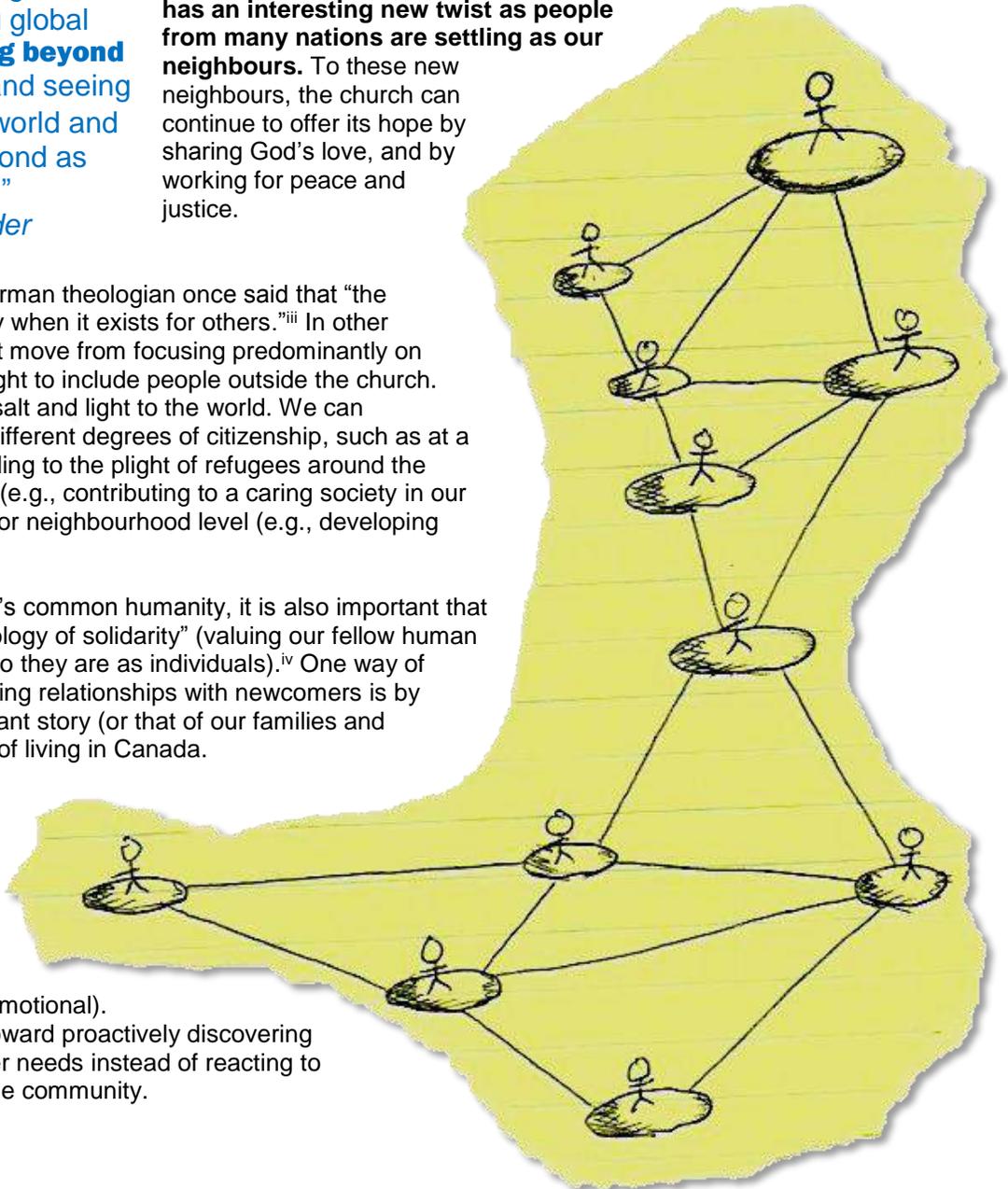
**"There is education in churches and emphasis on global citizenship, being global communities, seeing beyond Canada's borders and seeing the injustice in the world and how we can respond as Canadians."**  
*-Church leader*

In today's society, the world is literally at our doorsteps. **Jesus' great commission for the church to go into all the world has an interesting new twist as people from many nations are settling as our neighbours.** To these new neighbours, the church can continue to offer its hope by sharing God's love, and by working for peace and justice.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a German theologian once said that "the Church is the Church only when it exists for others."<sup>iii</sup> In other words, our churches must move from focusing predominantly on ourselves and shift our sight to include people outside the church. This is where we can be salt and light to the world. We can accomplish this through different degrees of citizenship, such as at a global level (e.g., responding to the plight of refugees around the world), at a national level (e.g., contributing to a caring society in our country), and at the local or neighbourhood level (e.g., developing healthy communities).

In connecting with people's common humanity, it is also important that our churches instil a "theology of solidarity" (valuing our fellow human beings and respecting who they are as individuals).<sup>iv</sup> One way of establishing and maintaining relationships with newcomers is by recognizing our own migrant story (or that of our families and friends) and the privilege of living in Canada.

As we begin to understand the needs of immigrants and refugees, we will develop a more holistic view of addressing people in all their needs (e.g., spiritual, physical, emotional). Our churches can work toward proactively discovering and addressing newcomer needs instead of reacting to needs of newcomers in the community.



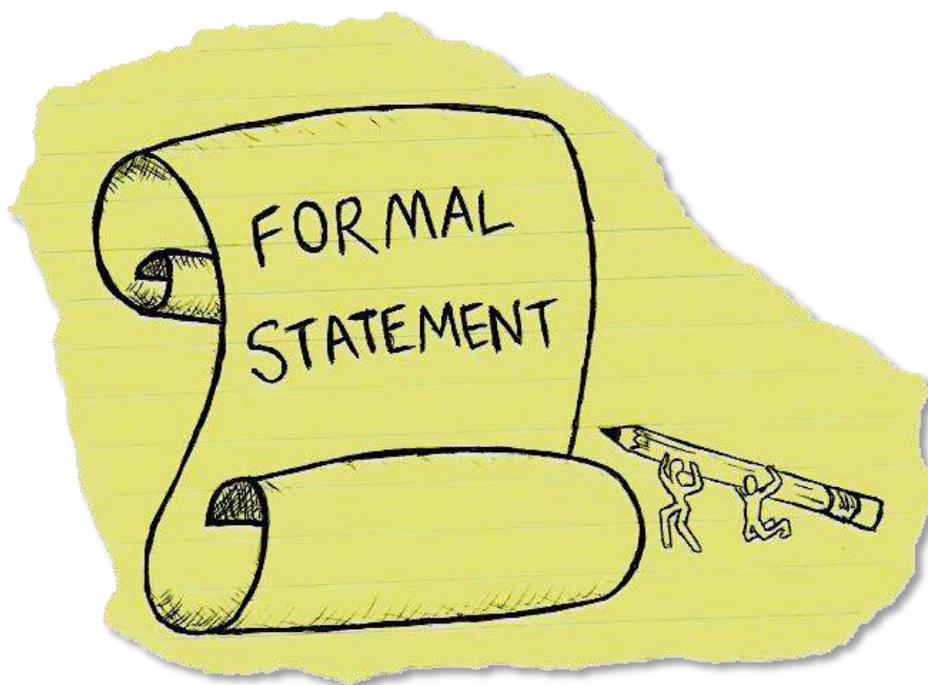
# Wayfinding Action

## WRITE A FORMAL STATEMENT TO WORK WITH NEWCOMERS

Does your church or denomination have a formal vision or mission statement? If so, does it include a vision to work with recent immigrants and refugees? The Role of Churches project found that churches and denominations that have a formal statement are more likely to provide staff resources to assist with the sponsorship of refugees and immigrants to Canada, partner with organizations or networks, and have a staff position that encourages others to be more responsive to immigrants, refugees, and cultural diversity.<sup>v</sup>

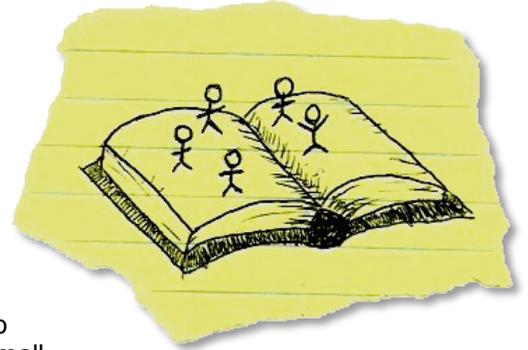
Whether your church is currently working with newcomers or is moving toward working with newcomers, consider writing a formal statement. It could help drive your congregation toward the vision of working with newcomers and it could help keep your church focused on God's mission. Here are some ideas to help you write a formal statement:

- 1) Use prayer to discern how, what, and where God would lead your church.
- 2) Initially, it may be helpful to create a small but diverse team of church leadership, lay leaders, and congregants who have personal newcomer experience to lead in this process—but ultimately you may work toward involving everyone.
- 3) Look at the needs of the newcomers that you would like to serve or are currently serving. Utilize those needs in your vision statement.
- 4) Use scripture as the Biblical mandate for your activity, centring on hospitality and response to needs.
- 5) Include and encourage people within your congregation who have experience being a newcomer to share their knowledge. Use their experiences as a guide.
- 6) Instead of re-creating the wheel, expand your current vision or mission statement for the church as a whole, creating intentional opportunities for newcomer services.



# Wayfinding Action

## ORGANIZE A BOOK OR BIBLE STUDY



One of the easiest ways to cast vision for working with newcomers is to organize a book study. This can be done through your congregation, small groups, friends, and associations. Book studies work especially well for people looking for opportunities to improve their English and learn more about the Canadian cultural context, idioms and expressions. Here are a few tips for organizing a book study:

- 1) If your church is in a city with a university or college, get permission from the school to host a book study for international students on campus.
- 2) Use a Bible study that highlights God's love for diversity and culture.
- 3) Use resources from organizations that cater specifically to newcomers (immigrants, refugees, international students, migrant workers, etc. See resource section for ideas).
- 4) Capitalize the launching of a book study around a Christian holiday (Christmas, Easter, etc.) and offer classes on its meaning, terminology and activities.
- 5) Encourage newcomers to suggest books for your church or group to study together.

## Suggested Books

**1** **Conspiracy of Kindness**  
Steve Sjogren

**2** **Strangers Next Door**  
Jervis D. Payne

\*Look for more books in the  
"Resources" section

# Wayfinding Action

## VISIT ANOTHER CHURCH OR COMMUNITY AGENCY

Sometimes, one of the best ways for our churches to discern the direction for where God wants us to serve newcomers is by visiting with other churches or community agencies who are working with recent immigrants and refugees. Some of the best ideas for working with newcomers come from church leaders sharing and constructively critiquing the work that each is doing. Here are some ways to get you started:

- 1) **Volunteer at a community agency.** While there, network with other volunteers to find out what other agencies are working with newcomers.
- 2) **Ask local community agencies for the names of churches** who regularly help out; then visit these churches and leaders.
- 3) **Network with other church leaders you already know**, including church leaders who are immigrants themselves. They may have contact information of churches working with recent immigrants and refugees.

SECTION  
**3**

# What Could We Do?

How does your church implement ways to work with immigrants and refugees? Do you offer conversational English as a Second Language (ESL) classes? Do you work with community organizations? Do you offer refugee services? Maybe your church does many of these tasks, or maybe none at all. As one key informant said, “There’s lots of ways churches can be involved, but that’s the thing ... to be involved.”<sup>vi</sup>



In order for our churches to be effective in working with newcomers, we must implement structures that strategically help us to work with immigrants and refugees. But even these structures can vary widely depending on the particular context and resources of our church. What is certain is that our churches need to be intentional in our approach and work with newcomers that will best realize our vision. **What churches are doing is directly connected to why they are doing it.**

As we begin to brainstorm ways that our churches could work with newcomers, we should keep in mind that a perfect systematic set of programs does not exist. In all likelihood, we will start to see that working with recent immigrants and refugees involves a combination of approaches encompassing multiple ideas implemented at different stages of our journey. What is important is that we find the activities and

partnerships that best facilitate our church members in working with immigrants and refugees. The Role of Churches project described these activities and partnerships as “structures”. Here are the three primary types of structures that emerged from the research:

- 1) Informal support (relational support/friendship)
- 2) Formal programs (classes, housing, etc.)
- 3) Partnerships (collaborating with other churches and groups)

## I. Informal Support

Informal support is probably the most underestimated means of working with newcomers. **Examples of informal support are friendships and personal relationships with individuals or families.** Our North American church culture tends to like helping and meeting needs of people more than opening ourselves for relationships and friendships. Still, relationship-building is an area where our churches can and do thrive.

Building relationships with newcomers can be as simple as stepping outside and meeting your neighbours next door or taking newcomers out for coffee. This initial relational connection may be an important milestone in the settlement experience of immigrants and refugees.

Many newcomers seek and need resources to ease their adjustment into their new homeland. However, **it is often friendships and relationships that are the most positive and effective support for recent immigrants and refugees.** We shouldn't downplay the role of friendships in meeting substantial emotional, social and spiritual needs as well as providing practical help (e.g., assistance in how to use public transit, language assistance, housing or job search help).

The intentional building of relationships can help recent immigrants and refugees feel welcomed, supported, and cared for. Remember that informal support provides newcomers with deep, meaningful relationships rather than our churches simply providing services. Also, through these friendships and relationships, newcomers are able to give something back in a healthy “give-and-take” relationship, empowering and encouraging mutuality.

“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.”  
-Church leader

# Wayfinding Action



## INVITE NEWCOMERS FOR DINNER AT YOUR HOME

Think back to the most recent time you had someone over for dinner. Was it a family member? A friend? A member from your church? We often underestimate the relational power of food and hospitality. Many newcomers value time as an indispensable aspect of relationship building, especially when spent sharing a meal or coffee with Canadians. Build relationships with newcomers through food and hospitality through:

- 1) **Initiate a relationship.** Welcome a new family that has moved into the community as soon as you notice them. On your next visit, take them a small gift. Next, invite them over for dinner.

- 2) **Informally “sponsor” an international student.** International students are often limited in financial resources, and as a result they restrict their meals because of their limited budget. Also, being away from their country, they may be lonely and homesick. Sometimes a simple home cooked meal can meet the immediate needs of newcomers while establishing firm relationships.
- 3) **Hear their story.** Newcomers often have a compelling story of their journey in getting to Canada. Spend time and listen to their story.
- 4) **Share your own story.** You (or your parents or grandparents) may be an immigrant or refugee, or perhaps your ancestors have lived here for centuries or millennia. There’s a story to tell.

## II. Formal Programs

There are many formal programs that can be used to meet the needs of newcomers as they present themselves, as well as structures that address pre-determined needs. Many churches working with newcomers offer a conversational English class. Other churches and denominations across Canada offer other formal supports such as food banks, marriage counselling, career/job counselling, settlement services, furniture provision, hosting programs, soccer camps, and movie nights.

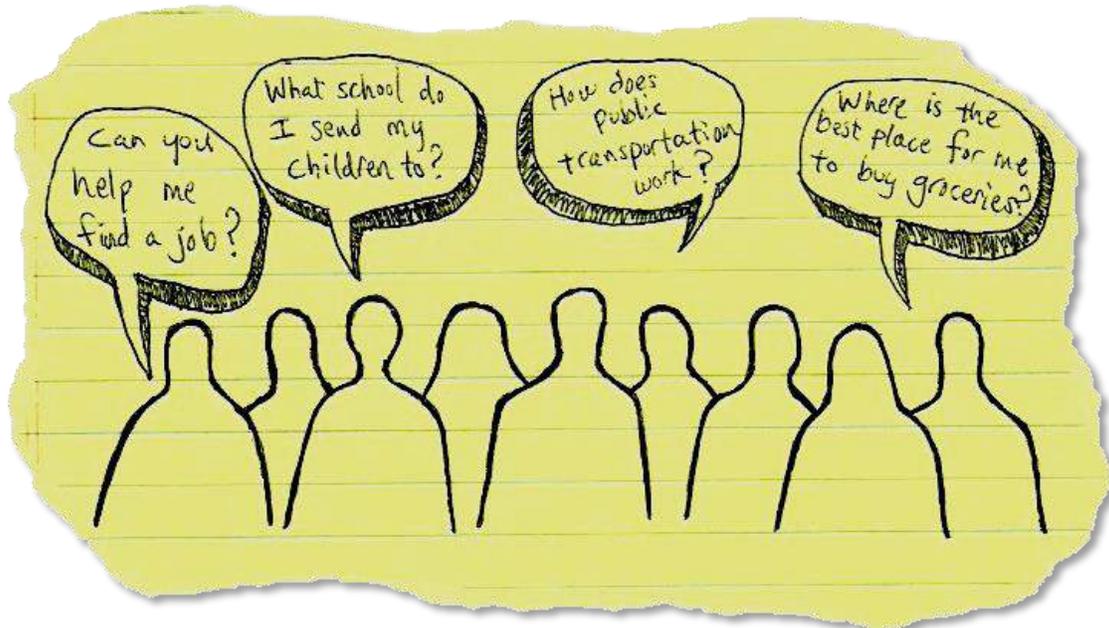
“In the community, people are really generous with their money, but not their time. And it’s **time** that they [immigrants and refugees] need most.”  
*-Church leader*

Some churches have networks in other countries that make contact with potential immigrants to help them with the immigration process. Surfacing from the Role of Churches project are **three main areas where churches can develop formal structures to help in the settlement and integration process:**

- 1) Addressing immediate settlement needs
- 2) Advocating for immigrants and refugees
- 3) Assisting with long-term integration needs

### Addressing Immediate Settlement Needs

Addressing immediate settlement needs involve the services and supports that immigrants or refugees initially need in order to settle in Canadian society. **Immediate settlement needs include both practical and spiritual needs.** Examples of **practical needs** include access to education, transportation, employment, doctors’ appointments, English as a Second Language (ESL) programs, legal and paralegal services, housing, and help with shopping for groceries, clothing and furniture. Examples of **spiritual needs** include having access to church services in a newcomer’s native language and opportunities to connect with others of the same ethnicity and/or faith tradition.



## Advocating For Immigrants and Refugees

When churches and individuals gain experience in working with newcomers, they usually acquire an increased understanding of the immigration or refugee process, which often leads to increased advocacy. One participant from the Role of Churches project said:

*“When you do get involved, you do start to see a little further ... They [church groups] will see the lack of services or they’ll see the lack of acceptance, or maybe [they’ll] see a sort of a discrepancy between the government message around refugees and what they’re experiencing themselves working with refugees. And I think in some cases that has led people into becoming advocates.”<sup>vii</sup>*

**What is advocacy?** Advocacy is the public support of a particular cause or policy. One of the major reasons why advocacy is important is that it gives voice to an issue in need of attention. An example of advocacy is Jesus’ public ministry to the poor, the sick, the afflicted, and the marginalized. He respected the dignity of men and women, as well as loved all people without discrimination. Good advocacy grows out of what we know, what we have heard, and what we have seen, especially based on our relationships with people most affected by the issue. Good advocacy involves speaking clearly, thoughtfully, and assertively based on our relationships with those affected by policy.

### Advocacy work can include many different things:

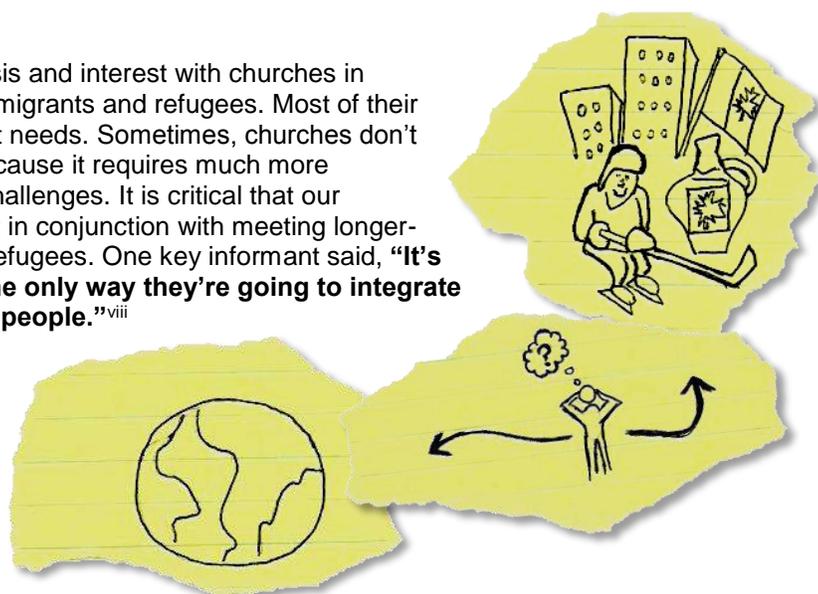
- Analyzing policies from a faith perspective
- Meeting with Members of Parliament and/or legislative staff
- Sending letters or petitions to government departments
- Creating forums in which those affected by policies can speak for themselves
- Praying for government officials

**What are some of the risks?** Being misunderstood, finding yourself lumped in with people with whom you don’t agree, feeling pressured to downplay your faith, losing sight of faithfulness while searching for effectiveness, losing rapport by becoming too partisan.

**Questions to think about:** How can our advocacy work be an outgrowth of reciprocal relationships, especially those including people with fairly significant power differentials? Does advocacy work reinforce power imbalances? Can advocacy work revolutionize power imbalances? Can advocacy work create opportunities for people to connect in new ways?

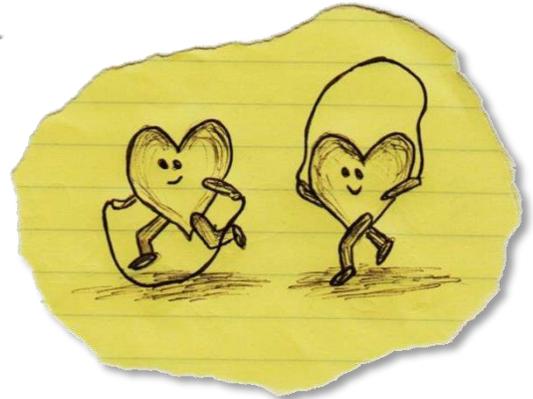
### Assisting With Longer-Term Integration

There seems to be much less of an emphasis and interest with churches in supporting the longer-term integration of immigrants and refugees. Most of their efforts revolve around immediate settlement needs. Sometimes, churches don’t get involved with longer-term integration because it requires much more commitment over time and involves more challenges. It is critical that our churches provide ongoing relational support in conjunction with meeting longer-term integration needs for immigrants and refugees. One key informant said, **“It’s relationship—that’s what they need ... The only way they’re going to integrate is if they feel comfortable with Canadian people.”<sup>viii</sup>**



# Wayfinding Action

## CREATE YOUR OWN PROGRAM



One practical way of implementing a formal structure is for your church to create its own program for assisting immigrants and refugees. First of all, think about the **relationships your church has made with recent immigrants and refugees.**

- Are there specific ethnic groups in your community or neighbourhood?
- Is there a university or college near your church hosting a number of international students?

Secondly, think about the **re-occurring practical ways that you have supported newcomers.**

- Are there specific needs such as friendship, companionship, food, etc., which re-occurs with newcomers you have helped?

Thirdly, think about the **resources your congregation has to meet those needs in an ongoing way.**

- Does your church have people resources, financial resources, physical space, etc., which you can use to offer and assist newcomers?
- Are there other community organizations or churches nearby with whom you could partner?

It is often helpful to look to your own congregation for assistance. Talk with recent immigrants and refugees in your congregation about what type of program would make most sense. Through their experience, they may be aware of the most demanding short-term and long-term needs. Also, ask them if they would like to help lead this program. By having newcomers participate as leaders, it gives your program a sense of shared mutuality among the members in your congregation and newcomers, increasing credibility for your church and impact for your community.

Also, talking with neighbouring churches and community organizations who support recent immigrants and refugees is important to make sure you are not creating a program that already exists. Avoiding this pitfall can save your congregation much headache and financial resources. For example, if a neighbouring church offers an ESL class, consider complimenting this class with a conversational English language group which meets after the ESL class. However, if your church is able to meet a need that is not currently being met, consider creating your own program and let others know about it. You may find that other churches and community partners may want to help you to make it easier to run. And remember that programs don't have to be complicated to be effective. Sometimes, a simple program like conducting a clothing drive can make a huge impact for newcomers.

**Here are some categories of programs that your congregation could implement:**

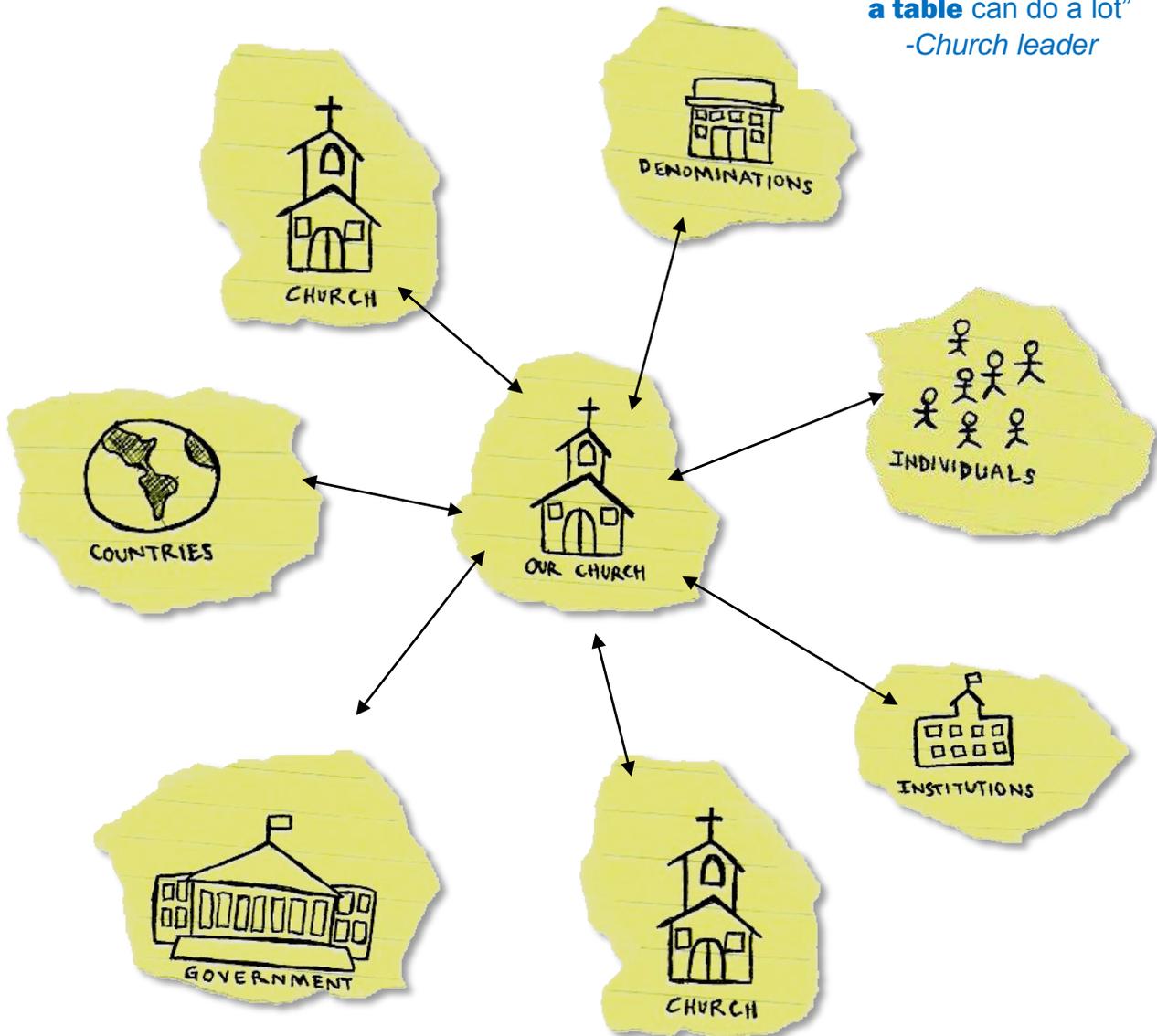
- Meeting immediate settlement/relief needs (e.g., food, clothing, housing, legal support)
- Providing personal development programs (e.g., English language, social clubs, host programs)
- Providing community development programs (e.g., job development, health care)
- Advocating for systemic change (e.g., refugee policy club)
- Holding activities to meet spiritual needs (e.g., prayer meetings, newcomer-focused worship)
- Becoming a "sibling congregation" for a new immigrant congregation (e.g., offer support, space, prayer, finances)

### III. Partnerships

If we are honest with ourselves, many of us will realize that **our churches do not have the expertise for all things**. If we embrace this, we can often change our challenges into opportunities to develop effective partnerships with other churches and organizations. For some of us, our initial step is to look to partnering with those we have current relationships with (e.g. denominational networks).

Being connected to other churches, whether within the same denomination or cross denominationally because individual churches can learn from each other and inspire each other in their differing practices. Other churches may need to seek partnerships based on necessity (e.g., relationships with government organizations that are responsible for immigration services). Partnerships with community organizations can help churches become aware of the availability of other services and supports, then plan their role and actions accordingly.

“From the beginning we established this refugee advisory committee and so there we had people from health and the school district and community programs ... I think **being able to have everybody at a table** can do a lot”  
-Church leader



# Wayfinding Action

## SPONSOR A REFUGEE FAMILY COMMUNITY-STYLE

**Canadian churches has been involved with refugee settlement for a very long time.** One example is the harbouring of Black Loyalists who fled oppression from the American Revolution in the 1770's. More recently, the Immigration Act of the late 1970's allowed for private sponsorship of refugees. Since then churches in Canada have been sponsoring hundreds of refugees every year.

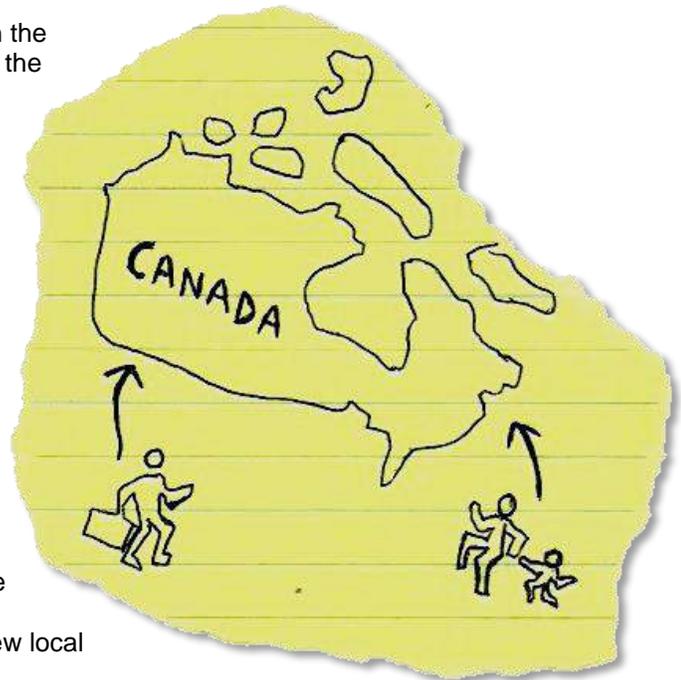
**By sponsoring a refugee family, churches have the opportunity to connect with people's common humanity, leading the way to share God's heart of love and compassion for the marginalized and oppressed.** As scripture informs us, our churches can welcome the stranger, love our neighbours, and help those in need. Refugees coming to Canada may come from countries that do not permit the gospel, so it is an amazing opportunity for our churches to bring the good news to these newcomers. Some refugees have a vibrant Christian faith, refined by the suffering they have experienced and they have the potential to revitalize our churches.

Once you are successful in the sponsorship of a refugee, your congregation doesn't have to walk this journey alone. In most cities and towns across Canada there are organizations who provide resources to help refugees to settle in Canada. You can visit them to see how they can work with you to assist the refugees you are sponsoring. Even if your community doesn't have a refugee-serving organization, look for other community groups, organizations or churches who could help in some way. For example, hearing the stories of other churches and learning from their experiences of sponsoring refugees can be helpful in supporting your sponsored refugee and avoiding the pitfalls of this process.

Another helpful idea is to involve your entire congregation in the sponsorship of a refugee. The church is often referred to as the 'family of God.' Just as families support one another in different ways, the individual members of your congregation can help care and support your sponsored refugees. Wrap your refugee family with a warm blanket of welcome from different quarters of your community.

Depending on your level of expertise and resources, here are **4 steps to get started in sponsoring a refugee:**

1. Form partnerships with other organizations that assist refugees. (See resources listed at the end of this Guide)
2. Reach out to other churches that are currently sponsoring refugees and learn from them.
3. Assist current refugees by taking them to government offices like Service Canada; help them apply for their Social Insurance Number, health care (federal and provincial), driver's license, etc.
4. Assist current refugees by orienting them to their new local community and the Canadian cultural context.



Lastly, government requirements for sponsoring refugees change so it is good to get the right facts about sponsorship procedures from updated and reputable sources. Here are some resources about sponsoring refugees: [Presbyterian World Service & Development](#), [Mennonite Central Committee](#), [The United Church of Canada](#), [World Renew](#) and the [Canadian Baptists of Ontario & Quebec](#).

# SECTION 4

## How Can We Learn From Each Other?

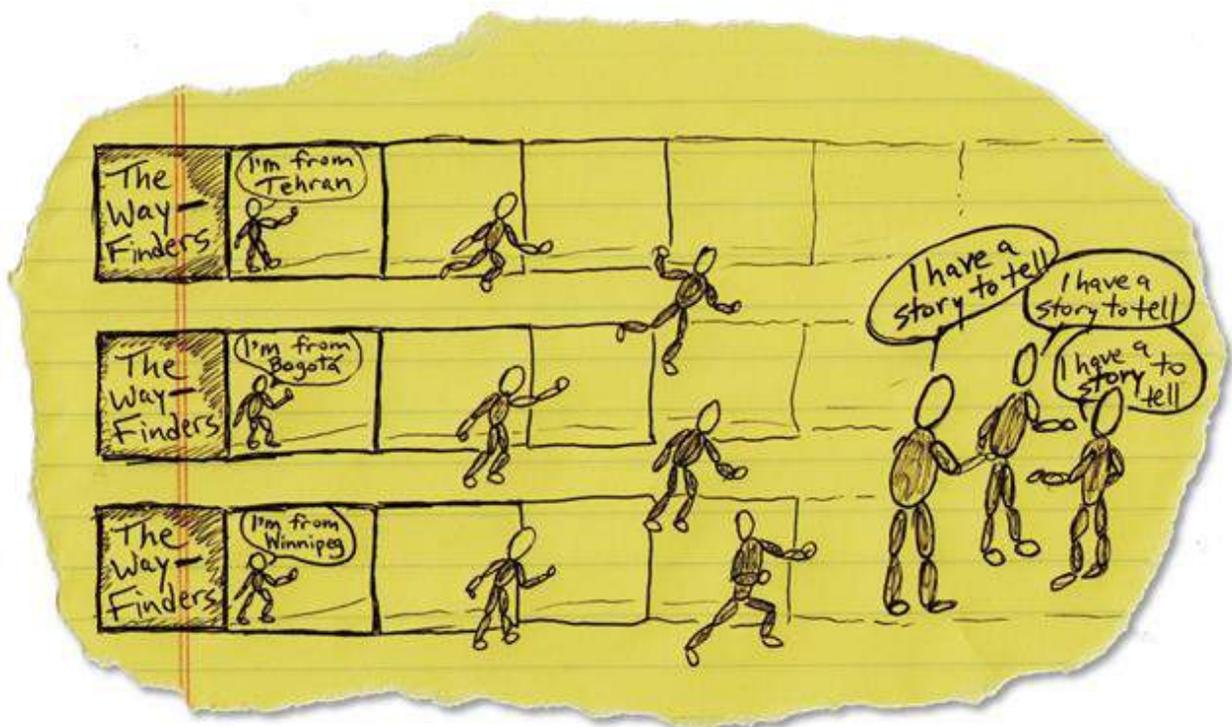
How can we learn from each other? On the one hand, this may seem like a simple question with a fairly straightforward answer: **We learn from each other by listening to each other and discovering things about each other.** Simple enough, right?

As we build relationships with people from other cultures, other faiths, and other traditions, we often discover complex dynamics – we speak different languages, we come with different political and/or economic power, we have different levels of access to everyday resources, we have different experiences with things like war and trauma, and we have different expectations of what Canadian society is supposed to be like.

In any case, we do not ask ourselves, “How can I teach this newcomer to be like me?” or “How can we teach this refugee family to assimilate into Canadian society?” because we do not have all the answers. Instead we start relationships and then ask, “How can we learn from one another?” and “What can we teach each other about what it means to be Canadian, and what it means to live in a peaceable and just community?”

Learning then becomes less about designing fancy curriculums and more about listening to one another’s stories, building relationships, and then letting those relationships steer the development of programs. During the first year of the Role of Churches project, participants regularly spoke about the relational character of immigrant and refugee ministry, and the importance of preparing ourselves for mutual encounter rather than anything one-sided.

“I think as Christian people we need to be on the front end of showing people that **we can set aside our differences and learn**, you know, adopt a posture of humility and learn to learn from each other.”  
-Church leader



# Wayfinding Action

## HOST AN INTERCULTURAL WORKSHOP

Learning from each other can be a complicated process when you add culture to the mix.

Everyone comes with one or more cultural traditions,

one or more languages, and one or more ways of looking at the world. We heard from one church leader who asked, “How do we move beyond smiling and shaking hands at church on Sunday and then moving back to our own ethno-specific communities during the week? How can we develop a skill base around facilitating dialogue across cultures?”

“In established Canadian churches...there’s still very much a way of thinking that says, ‘Well, our doors are open. If immigrants and refugees want to come, they can come’. I don’t think there is a profound understanding yet, that **welcoming strangers means being changed ourselves.**”

*-Church leader*

An intercultural workshop is a collaborative setting not only to learn about our various cultural backgrounds, traditions, and assumptions, but to learn through our cultural differences and similarities. Through an intercultural workshop we not only gain vocabulary to talk about cultural differences, but we also work together to analyze and even change intercultural dynamics in our interpersonal relationships and communities. Sometimes this kind of training includes elements of what is known as “cultural sensitivity” and “cross-cultural competency”, and it can also include activities and resources that are found within anti-racism training.

To prepare for an intercultural workshop, you could either bring in an outside facilitator or lead the workshop yourselves. In either case, we recommend looking through the following websites as examples of how to understand and work toward intercultural ministry.

- [United Church of Canada](#)
- [Atlantic Baptist Churches](#)
- [Free Methodist Church in Canada](#)
- [Tyndale Intercultural Ministries Centre](#)
- [Canadian Churches’ Forum](#)
- [Direction Chrétienne](#)



In addition to a full-fledged workshop, you might also want to encourage small-scale activities in which individuals can build up with intercultural awareness and sensitivity. For example, distribute a printed account of an immigrant or refugee story. Invite a few people to attend a multicultural festival together. Bring several ESL teachers together to lead a Sunday School class. Visit the offices of an interfaith organization or attend an interfaith event. Even if the “workshop” consists of a few people taking the time to experience something together, valuable intercultural learning can take place.

Where will this kind of learning take us? Some Christians talk about how the church itself needs to be transformed into an intercultural church, a church that reflects the scriptural vision of “the glory and the honour of the nations” (Rev. 21:26). Here’s how one author explains it: “To build a healthy intercultural church, we must commit ourselves to understand what seem to us the idiosyncrasies of cultures different from ours, and why people do things the way they do. **This will move us beyond ourselves, toward a deeper understanding of another person’s perspective.** Some of the perspectives that at first seem strange and alien may then find their way into the life of the congregation.”<sup>ix</sup>

# Wayfinding Action

## INITIATE A COMMUNITY ARTS PROJECT

Musicians, visual artists, photographers, and actors are always among us. Seek them out and let their work

inform and augment your ministry! Consider initiating a community-based arts project in which recent immigrants, refugees, and/or church communities are empowered to tell their stories or represent their experiences with the creative assistance of artists.

Why use the arts in this way? Community-based arts practitioner Deborah Barndt explains it this way: “When people are given the opportunity to tell their own stories – whether through oral traditions, theater, visual arts, music, or other media – they bring their bodies, minds, and spirits into a process of communicating and sharing their experiences; they affirm their lives as sources of knowledge, and they stimulate each other in a synergistic process of collective knowledge production. Art, education, and research become part of the same dynamic and creative process.”<sup>x</sup>

The basic idea is to use artistic expression as a way of empowering people, telling stories, learning about underlying social or political issues, and nurturing community. It is a way for people to represent their histories, their journeys, their struggles, and their hopes in multiple forms.

To get you started, here are just a few hypothetical examples of how a community-based arts project might contribute to the learning process. Be creative!

1. **PHOTOGRAPHY PROJECT** – “Doors Open, Doors Closed” – A local refugee settlement organization works together with a photography club to enable people to take close-up photographs of various doors (or doorknobs) in the community. These doors represent the various organizations, resources, and places that they experienced as being open or closed to them when they first arrived in Canada. After the photographs are put together with written narratives, a local church hosts the exhibition and raises money for the settlement organization.
2. **DRAMA PROJECT** – “Theatre of the Displaced” – Several theatre students who attend a local church provide support and facilitation for a group of youth who want to use drama to portray their experiences as the second-generation children of immigrants to Canada. The process of writing and rehearsing the drama makes a big impact on the young actors and, after the play is performed in the community, some of the community elders take the initiative to plan a new series of intergenerational events.
3. **MUSICAL PROJECT** – “Songs of Settlement” – A group of five diverse musicians launches a community-based song-writing project meant to express the real-life experiences of arriving in Canada as refugees and immigrants. Through ongoing community consultations and storytelling events, the musicians begin to write a series of “songs of settlement”. The process inspires several community members to write their own songs as well, and members of a local worship band spontaneously offer their time as accompanists. When the songs are performed at a culminating public event, further relationships are built with several agencies and churches that want to get involved.
4. **VISUAL ART PROJECT** – “Prayers and Paintbrushes” – A collaborative effort from a group of two pastors, three painters, and several volunteers from a local settlement agency yields a series of mixed-media canvases that include acrylic painting and prayer texts. Community members are invited to view the canvases and then write letters to their Members of Parliament to advocate on behalf of refugees. The canvases are also used in several churches to raise awareness about the possibility of sponsoring refugee families.



# Wayfinding Action

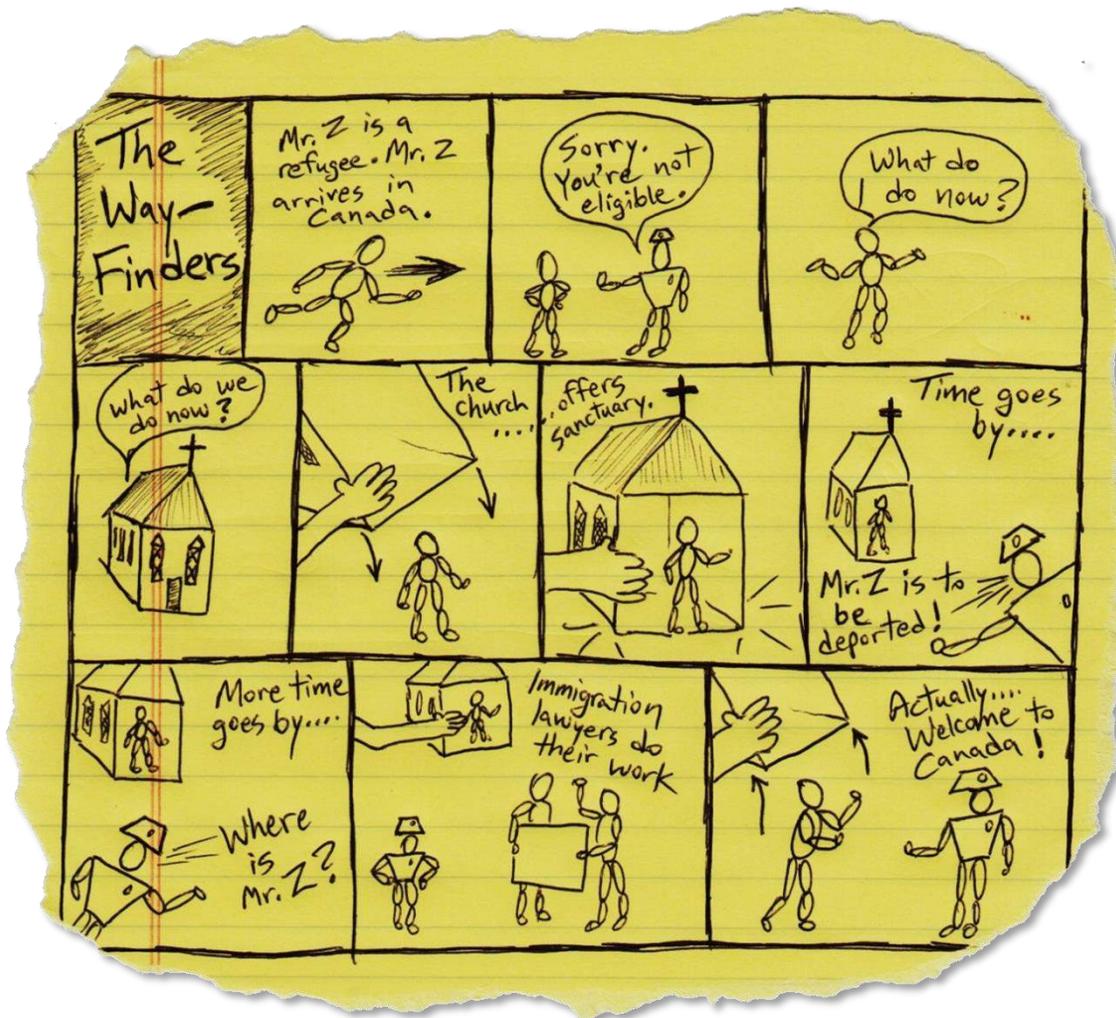
## CONSIDER OFFERING SANCTUARY

The Canadian Sanctuary Network defines “offering sanctuary” in this way: “Sanctuary is the act of offering a safe place for a

refugee who is facing deportation. Religious communities may offer their place of worship as a temporary shelter for a refused refugee in order to protect that person from deportation to a dangerous situation.”<sup>xi</sup>

More than 50 times in the last 30 years, Canadian churches have decided to offer sanctuary to refugees facing deportation.<sup>xii</sup> For example, a church in Regina opened its doors to two Nigerian university students who were facing deportation. A Russian man lived in a Vancouver church for three years while his deportation orders were being reviewed. A church building in Montreal became a temporary home for both a Colombian family and an Ethiopian family before they were finally granted Canadian citizenship.

Offering sanctuary can be controversial. Some say it is risky and illegal. Some say it is a legitimate and faithful action for a church to take. Consider this quote from a *Globe and Mail* columnist: “These places of sanctuary are remarkable outposts of decency in Canada today. They are united in a network of faith called the Canadian Sanctuary network. They understand what they are doing not only as an act of faith but also as a responsibility as citizens. The sanctuary network, drawing on some of the wisdom of the Sanctuary movement in the United States, has articulated its actions as a ‘civil initiative’. Offering Sanctuary is not an act of civil disobedience but rather an effort to uphold the law when a government has ceased to do so.”<sup>xiii</sup>



Your church may face a time when, in response to a local refugee claimant who is facing deportation, members of your church consider offering sanctuary for this person in your church building or, alternatively, in the home of a church member.

There are important opportunities and risks to prayerfully consider. In exceptional circumstances, offering sanctuary can provide protection for those threatened with deportation, and it becomes a unique opportunity for the church community to “step up” and build relationships not only with the refugee(s) but also with a variety of other governmental and nongovernmental organizations. At the same time, offering sanctuary involves significant financial and logistical commitments, as well as legal issues for which ongoing legal counsel may be required.

- To learn about the legal, financial, and logistical issues associated with offering sanctuary, explore the various denominational guides that are listed on the [Canadian Sanctuary Network](#)
- To read what a law professor has to say about the Canadian legal issues of offering sanctuary, read [this article](#) that appeared in the journal *Refuge*.
- To read about a specific example of a church in British Columbia that offered sanctuary in 2013, see pages 15 to 18 in the [Vancouver site report](#) of the Role of Churches project

## Wayfinding Action

TIE A STRING AROUND YOUR FINGER

Whether you are just on the verge of getting involved in refugee and immigrant ministry or you have been working in this area for years, you can probably identify persistent questions, key issues, or specific hopes that are really important for where you find yourselves at this time. People have been known to tie a string around their finger if they want to remind themselves of something very important. Consider these “reminding ideas” that go from the literal to the symbolic:

1. **Make banners for your church sanctuary** – Work with a group to identify some of the key questions, encouragements, insights, or thoughts that would enhance your worship and inspire your particular work. Banners could include very straightforward questions like “Who are the newcomers among us?” and “Immigrants are our neighbours”, or more provocative words like “What does our church need to seek refuge from?” or “Wanted: Refuge from fear”. A banner could articulate a confessional statement like “We seek protection from fear” or “Something is holding us back”, or it could use keywords in a creative way, such as “Deportation Hearing: Hope to be Deported”. A banner featuring the words “I have a story to tell...” can accompany a music and storytelling event, a Bible study, or public information meeting about immigration policy. Another option is a banner that says, “Jesus was a refugee”. Be creative!
2. **Organize a virtual rally** – Use Facebook, Twitter, or another social networking site to generate regular reminders about a current or developing ministry project. For example, if your church is considering sponsoring a refugee family, use social networking to distribute both informational items pertaining to the sponsorship process and inspirational quotes that convey encouragement

“Who are we willing to become in terms of character and purpose in order that the newcomer knows that they are welcome?”

-Church leader

and affirmation. Create a memorable hashtag or group name that has something to do with “wayfinding” or “working together” or “we are one”. Be creative!

3. **Tie a string around your finger** – In the midst of whatever ministry projects you are planning or carrying out, remind yourselves of why you are doing what you are doing. Literally tie strings around your fingers as a way of reminding yourselves of the biblical passage or the refugee story or the vision statement that got you involved in the first place. Or tie a string around the front door of your church. Or tie a rope around the potluck table. Be creative



## Where do we go from here?

We have tried to offer a variety of ideas to inform and motivate your own work with immigrant and refugee ministry. We assume that the Wayfinding Actions in this guide represent a small fraction of the many kinds of actions that will be initiated by Canadian churches moving forward.

You might find that your relationships with immigrants and refugees have brought you to a new place where the way ahead is crystal clear. Or you might find that the journey has come full circle, and you are exploring issues and possibilities that you thought were behind you. Regardless of where you find yourselves, we hope that this Guide leaves you with a sense that something very momentous lies ahead.

As your journey takes you beyond the pages of this Guide, we leave you with these promising words from the prophet Jeremiah: “For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope” (Jeremiah 29:11).

### Prayer for the Wayfinders

All glory and praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ!

You came among us to show the way of justice and peace,

To teach us how to love ourselves, our neighbours, and our enemies.

You walked and talked with those on the edge,

You shared the good news and you offered freedom to the oppressed.

You told us to follow your way.

Lord Jesus Christ,

What do your teachings mean for us in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?

How do we follow your way?

Kindle our imagination, and give us new understandings of your ministry.

Liberate our hearts, and set us on fire.

Open our ears, and let us hear your unstoppable Word.

Lord Jesus Christ, yours is the way,

And we are the wayfinders. AMEN.

# Definitions

Here's what we meant by the words we used:

**Immigrant**

A person who resides in Canada but was born outside of Canada.

**Refugee**

A person who is forced to flee to another country due to persecution.

**Refugee claimant**

A person who is making a claim to another country for refugee protection.

**Newcomer**

An immigrant, including a refugee or refugee claimant, who has recently come to Canada.

**Settlement**

Focuses on the shorter-term transitional issues upon first arrival in Canada.

**Integration**

Focuses on the longer-term process of belonging and becoming fully included within Canadian society.

**Congregation**

A group of Christians who regularly gather together at a designated location to worship, promote religious beliefs, and minister to each other as well as others.

**Denomination**

A network or organizational structure that oversees multiple congregations.

More detailed information about immigrant-related definitions can be found at these websites:

- Canadian Council of Refugees [list of definitions](#)
- Government [website](#) about programs to apply to immigrate to Canada

# Resources

## RESEARCH REPORTS from the first year of the *Role of Churches* project

The Role of Churches [website](#) contains all the following reports:

1. [Summary report](#)
2. [National key informant report](#)
3. [National denominational survey](#)
4. [Literature review summary](#)
5. [Annotated bibliography](#)
6. Site research reports from Montreal, [Vancouver](#), [Toronto](#), [East Coast](#)

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## CHURCH-BASED RESOURCES

[Canadian Baptists of Ontario and Quebec](#)

[Canadian Council of Churches](#)

[Canadian Friends Service Committee \(CFSC\)](#)

[Canadian Lutheran World Relief](#)

[Canadian Sanctuary Network](#)

Catholic Immigrant Services in Your Region (e.g., [Calgary Catholic Immigration Society](#))

[Christian Direction/Direction Chrétienne](#)

Christian Reformed Church – ["Immigration and Refugees"](#)

[Citizens for Public Justice](#)

Development and Peace (Catholic) – [Guide to Advocacy](#)

[Evangelical Fellowship of Canada](#)

KAIROS Canada – ["God's people: A people on the move"](#)

[Mennonite Church Canada](#)

[Mennonite Central Committee](#)

[Tyndale Intercultural Ministries Centre](#)

Presbyterian Church in Canada – ["Staying rooted in an uprooted world"](#)

[Refugee Highway Partnership](#)

"So the message that we repeatedly want to put out is that you [church groups] don't have to do this on your own – that **there are resources** and people with experience."  
-Church leader

United Church of Canada

UReach Toronto

## **EXAMPLES OF CHRISTIAN ORGANIZATIONS SERVING IMMIGRANTS AND REFUGEES**

Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers

Journey Home Community, Burnaby

Matthew House, Toronto

Kinbrace Refugee Housing and Support, Vancouver

Mennonite New Life Centre, Toronto

Micah House, Hamilton

Mennonite Coalition for Refugee Support, Kitchener

Romero House, Toronto

“There are a lot of organizations that are set up to assist immigrants and refugees. It would be good for church groups to know all of those, maybe even be involved in some of those.”  
*-Church leader*

## **OTHER SETTLEMENT RESOURCES**

Affiliation of Multicultural Societies and Services Agencies of BC

Alberta Association for Immigrant Serving Agencies

Canadian Council for Refugees

Citizenship and Immigration Canada Statistics

Government of Canada – Information for Sponsorship Agreement Holders

Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia

International Association for Refugees

Manitoba Immigrant Services

Manitoba Interfaith Immigration Council

Maytree Foundation

Metropolis – Immigration research and policy development

New Brunswick Immigrant Services

Newfoundland Immigrant Services

Northwest Territories Immigrant Services

Nunavut Immigrant Services

Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants

Prince Edward Island Immigrant Services

Quebec Immigrant Services

Saskatchewan Immigrant Services

Settlement.Org – Settlement Information for Newcomers

Welcome B.C.

Yukon Immigrant Services

## Endnotes

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