



Engaging Immigration

CONGREGATION & VISITORS



Engaging Immigration

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Leader's Guide

How to use "Practical Ministry Skills" by BUILDING CHURCH LEADERS in your regularly scheduled meetings.

Welcome to BUILDING CHURCH LEADERS: Your Complete Guide to Leadership Training. You've purchased an innovative resource that will help you develop leaders who can think strategically and biblically about the church. Selected by the editors of Leadership Journal, the material comes from respected thinkers and church leaders.

"Practical Ministry Skills" is completely flexible and designed to be easy to use. Each theme focuses on a practical area of church ministry and comprises brief handouts on specific aspects of that ministry. The handouts give a succinct and practical overview of the issues most relevant to your goals. You may use them at the beginning of a meeting to help launch a discussion, or you may hand them out as brief primers for someone new to a particular ministry.

Pastors and church leaders will find this theme useful in helping their staff and leaders understand how immigration shapes needs in the community and pursue the church's call to welcome the stranger and serve those in need. It is designed to offer encouragement and wisdom for those who lead the church and to help them develop Jesus' heart for the stranger so they can develop it in others.

For insight into how the gospel intersects with issues surrounding immigration, see "Seeking Jesus' Heart for the Stranger" by Noel Castellanos (pp. 3–4) and "Called to Love" by Carmille L. Akande (pp. 5–6). "Welcoming the Stranger" (pp. 7–10) is full of practical advice from Matthew Soerens on how your church can take a more active role in engaging those impacted by immigration. To think more deeply about how these issues impact those around you, you will find "When a Problem Becomes Personal" (pp. 11–12) and "4 Ways Immigration Impacts the Mission of the Church" (pp. 13–14) helpful. Both "A Clear and Present Mission" by Matthew Soerens (pp. 15–17) and "5 Good Ways to Welcome Strangers" by Dale Hanson Bourke (pp. 18–19) will offer you practical ideas for starting ministries that support local immigrant populations. And "Practical Wisdom for Multiethnic Ministry" (pp. 20–22) will help you prepare to work through issues that arise as first- and second-generation immigrant communities grow in your church.

This theme recognizes that immigration is only growing as a national and local issue, and the church has an opportunity to respond in meaningful and practical ways. We hope you find this material helpful as you engage immigration issues in your church and community and welcome the stranger in your midst.

Need more material, or something on a specific topic? See our website at www.BuildingChurchLeaders.com.

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Seeking Jesus' Heart for the Stranger

Jesus consistently gives high priority to those who are alienated and without much hope.

Luke 22:63–65

A quick overview of the story of God makes it clear that those on the margins are at the center of his love and concern. When I say this, there is often strong reaction by those of us who are wealthy and in power (which includes the majority of Americans) to the idea that God could have some type of exclusive concern for one group of people over another. But, remember that God reveals himself to us as Father.

As a parent of three children, when one of my kids was in crisis or suffering, it was not at all difficult for me to leave the other two children on their own for a time while I gave special attention to my sick or suffering child. This special love and concern does not exclude my other children from my absolute love, but it does give priority to my ailing child. It seems Jesus consistently gives high priority to those who are alienated and without much hope.

The fact that Jesus entered the world as a Galilean Jew is significant. God does not incarnate himself among the religious and political elite, but comes into the world on the periphery of Roman and Jewish existence. He is conceived in the womb of a young woman, Mary who is not yet married, which most likely created much commotion in the village of Nazareth where she and her fiancé resided. Like many urban young people today, they had to endure that scandal, and to make life even more difficult, Joseph and Mary were forced to flee their hometown with their son to a neighboring nation as immigrants to escape persecution and genocide. And, like most immigrants, they could not find adequate housing in their time of transition and crisis.

Even a casual reading of Jesus' ministry in the Gospels reveals a constant preoccupation with those pushed aside by the mainstream. The widow, the lame, the outsider, the poor and the rejected always seem to be the focal point of his encounters and ministry activity. When he does minister to the rich and powerful, like Zacchaeus, he seems to point them toward a redemptive opportunity that includes making things right with the poor as an expression of true repentance.

His teaching and parables also put great emphasis on a right understanding of the kingdom in relationship to those who are on the margins of society. When you throw a party, Jesus said, do not do it like the majority of people in society, who only invite those who will return the favor. Instead, when you organize and plan a lavish banquet, invite the outsider, the stranger, the weak, the broken, and the scandalously sinful who do not normally get invited to such affairs. The kingdom of God is like that kind of party, Jesus says.

When describing the greatest commandment of all, loving God and loving our neighbor, Jesus tells the story of a man beaten and broken by the side of the road who is neglected by the religious folks but shown love, kindness and mercy by an outsider who is the one that demonstrates what it really means to love our neighbor. For Jesus, walking by and ignoring a needy individual is not an option for anyone who claims to be in relationship with his Father.

In Matthew 25, Jesus makes a radical statement: when we minister to these neglected individuals we in fact minister to Jesus himself. The book of Hebrews reminds us that Jesus was crucified outside the city gates of Jerusalem, in a place called Golgotha, the place where criminals and thieves were executed for their crimes. He lays down his sinless life for the redemption of the entire world in this despised place on the margins of both religious and political power and respectability. The significance of this is startling when we consider how Jesus lays down not only his life but his reputation. God allows his only begotten Son to be murdered and crucified alongside criminals, so that everyone in the human race would understand that no one is beyond redemption, or inclusion, in his kingdom.

When I reflect on the last hours of Jesus' life before his crucifixion, what stands out is the way he was insulted and mocked by the crowds. The Bible says that they hurled all sorts of terrible insults at him (Luke 22:65 NLT). This verbal abuse is a significant way that the suffering of Jesus is connected to our undocumented neighbors.

When I think back on my last 10 years spent working to lift up the needs of the undocumented and to make changes in our broken immigration laws, I am both shocked and appalled at the insults I have heard levied against these men, women, and children who, yes, have broken laws to be in this country, but, who have also been hired, used, and often abused by employers and our economic system in need of cheap labor. Because of

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their vulnerable status, it has become common to scapegoat and hurl insults at them without regard to the fact that they are human beings created in the image of God. What has been most shocking is when these types of insults have been made by those claiming to be followers of Christ.

In Jesus' false conviction, beating, suffering, enduring of all kinds insults, and in his brutal death, everyone would see that his forgiving grace is for all, and that redemption is offered to all, regardless of the severity of our past trespasses or sinfulness.

So, when we speak about God's love for the stranger, it is not a conversation that is based on any one particular verse pulled randomly from an ancient text, but a striking truth that is rooted in the entire revelation of God's salvific activity that culminates on the cross. This indeed is Good News to the poor, and to all believers redeemed by the radical love of Jesus.

—NOEL CASTELLANOS is the CEO of the Christian Community Development Association; adapted from our sister publication *Christianity Today*, © 2014 Christianity Today. For more articles like this, visit www.christianitytoday.com.

Discuss

1. What is the Good News that the gospel offers to the strangers in our midst? How does our church or ministry communicate this in our words and in our actions?
2. How does Jesus' incarnation shape our view of God's heart for those who are alienated? Where are points of connection between Jesus' experience and those of immigrants among us?
3. Why do we sometimes struggle to share Jesus' heart for the stranger? What are the tensions we experience as we engage this issue?

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Called to Love*Did Jesus say to welcome only the documented stranger?*

Exodus 23:9

I met Sofia* about nine years ago. We began to hang out at church functions and tried to encourage each other in the Lord. After getting to know Sofia, I noticed she kept making poor decisions with men. I never understood why. At some point I realized that Sofia needed someone to take care of her. I didn't understand why she wouldn't just get a job and be responsible for her own family. I didn't know.

At some point Sofia revealed to me that she was undocumented. If you could have seen the look in her eyes: the shame, the guilt. Sofia came to the United States when she was 9 years old. She was brought to this country by her mother. She now has a teenage daughter who has spent her entire life in the United States. Sofia has also spent the majority of her life as an American. She has no experience living in Mexico. I know some shout, "Go back!" I know Sofia's heart would respond, "Go back to what? America is where I have built my life; it is my home, my country."

When I think of Sofia, I think of a quote I once heard: "We didn't cross the borders, the borders crossed us." Sofia's mom, like many immigrants, came to the United States for better opportunities. They came for a chance to provide for their families. What would you do if you were desperate?

While it may be difficult to know how I would respond in that situation, I am firmly convinced that I am obligated to love and welcome the stranger. As a servant who spends a lot of my time participating in local and foreign missions, I have been obsessed with Matthew 25. However, I must admit I have never focused on the "welcome the stranger" portion of the scripture. In this passage, Jesus was pretty clear that we are to invite the stranger in. Jesus explained that when we invite the stranger in, we are truly inviting himin. The way we treat the stranger is a clear indication of whether we are his true followers. It is imperative to point out that Jesus didn't say "documented stranger." He said "stranger," period, just as he didn't advocate visiting only those who didn't deserve to be in prison. People of God, we can't pick and choose what issues we want to view through the lens of the Bible. Shouldn't we view everything through the filter of the Scriptures?

In Exodus 23:9, God warned the Israelites not to oppress the stranger. He entreated them to remember the time when they were strangers. He reminded them that they, of all people, should remember what it feels like to be a stranger, to be an outsider.

The United States is a nation of immigrants. As an African American, I know how it feels to be treated as a second-class citizen. So my heart breaks when I hear African Americans making derogatory comments about Hispanic people. Have we all forgotten that this land "belonged" to the Native Americans? Have we all forgotten that we are all immigrants whether we came voluntarily or involuntarily? Do we really have the moral platform to say "do things the right way?" I think we would all agree that Native Americans would say no, we don't.

Matthew 7:12 instructs us to treat others the way we want to be treated. I believe the Golden Rule applies in all areas of life and immigration is not excluded. If we were the undocumented immigrants, wouldn't we want an opportunity for citizenship, an opportunity to make things right? Would we want to be stripped away from our spouses, children, or parents?

This is not a Republican or Democrat issue. Immigrants are not statistics. They are real people, with real feelings and emotions. They are people who want economic opportunities to provide for their families; people who deserve to be welcomed in, just as we would welcome our Savior.

—CARMILLE L. AKANDE is a licensed attorney, a freelance writer, and a full-time missionary in Ghana, West Africa; adapted from our sister publication *Gifted for Leadership*, © 2014 Christianity Today. For more articles like this, visit <http://www.christianitytoday.com/gifted-for-leadership/>.

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Discuss

1. How do stories like Sofia's impact our view of immigration issues?
2. Put yourself in Sofia's shoes. How would you want to be treated? What does living out the Golden Rule look like in this situation?
3. How does the theme of the stranger play out in the Bible? What parallels does this have to our present day?

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Welcoming the Stranger

How churches can best respond to immigration issues.

Revelation 7:9–10

When was the last time you heard about immigration on the news? It's everywhere: a lot of people have a lot of very strong opinions about this complex issue that is the subject of much political debate. If you listen to the news long enough, it's easy to believe that it's all about laws and policies and to forget that it's also about the family living down the street.

When was the last time you heard about immigration in your church? Too often churches ignore the reality of how immigration impacts their community and the people both inside and outside the walls of the church, and in doing so not only miss out on the opportunity to serve those who have great need—they dismiss the biblical call to “welcome the strangers” in their midst.

Damon Schroeder wants to help churches engage that call and live it out well. This is the central purpose of his work, both as Director of U.S. Church Mobilization for World Relief, as well as Executive Director of the Immigration Coalition, a group of organizations and denominations that are committed to “welcoming the stranger” and to equipping local churches to serve and reach under-resourced immigrants through immigration legal ministry. He spoke with BuildingChurchLeaders.com managing editor Laura Leonard about his work, why it's so important for the local church to engage immigration issues, and how churches can better reach and serve the immigrant populations in their communities.

Tell me about your work with World Relief and Church-Based Immigrant Ministry Coalition (aka Immigration Coalition).

As a former missionary kid now planted in the North American mission field, one of my greatest passions is to see Christians build cross-cultural relationships for the gospel. World Relief's mission is to “empower the local church to serve the most vulnerable.” My role at World Relief is to equip and guide our U.S. Ministries leaders and staff into that mission. The emergence of the Church-Based Immigrant Ministry Coalition in the last year and a half is a natural extension of World Relief's mission and commitment to see the local church in the U.S. “welcoming the stranger” in word and deed.

Why is it important for church leaders to prioritize this issue?

Because God does. Ultimately, our guidance on immigration comes from Scripture. Among other significant biblical evidence, God used the Hebrew word *ger* ninety-two times in the Bible; we know he has a significant concern for the “sojourner.”

Beyond this, church leaders care about people and the local church. Immigration is much more than an issue. “It” has a face and a name; it lives in our neighborhood—1 in 8 Americans are immigrants—and it sits in our church seats. According to Timothy Tennent, missiologist and president of Asbury Theological Seminary, “86 percent of the immigrant population in North America is likely to either be Christians or become Christians... The immigrant population actually presents the greatest hope for Christian renewal in North America.”

Unfortunately, recent Gordon-Conwell Seminary research reports that 60 percent of those from non-Christian religious traditions in the U.S.—most of them immigrants—say they do not know any Christians. This may be because only 20 percent of Protestant Christians (and 16 percent of white evangelicals) have heard about immigration from their pastor or other clergy.

What does it look like for local churches to “welcome the stranger?” How can churches best serve the immigrants in their communities?

The word hospitality in the Greek is *philoxenia*: literally, the love of strangers. A powerful illustration of “welcoming the stranger” comes from a pastor-friend of mine who was sent with his family as a missionary to Indonesia (an 88 percent Muslim country) just six weeks before 9/11. The attack on America and subsequent U.S. invasion of Afghanistan brought angry crowds into the streets demanding the expulsion of foreigners (especially Americans) from Indonesia. Understandably shaken, housebound, and unsure of how to respond, my friend received a knock at the door from Muslim leaders in their community who proactively came to them to assure them that they were honored guests who had nothing to fear and would be protected, and that they wanted him and his family to remain in Indonesia. Sometimes Americans need to look eastward to the best examples of hospitality and welcome.

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The best examples I have seen of churches serving first generation immigrants in their community are those committed first and foremost to building relationships. With first generation immigrant communities, there are often important physical, educational, and economic needs, but the emotional and relational needs are typically underestimated on both sides of the “service equation.”

How have you seen local churches responding poorly to the immigration issue?

Fear is the most problematic response to immigration among church leaders and members. This is not because it is unnatural, but because it is so unbiblical and fuels so many other unfortunate—and often destructive—outcomes. Let’s just call it what it is: xenophobia is in our churches. Fear of immigrants leads to myriad issues: negative stereotyping, ethnocentrism, isolationist mentality, rejection of facts that contradict that fear, unwelcoming churches, racism, discrimination. And fear begets fear. As church leaders embrace a biblical response to immigration, they often fear dramatic resistance on the part of congregants who may disagree strongly with their perspective or teaching on immigration.

The on the flip side, immigrant church leaders and members fear hostility and rejection, even by other Christians. This is normative for immigrant communities. Those who are undocumented most dramatically fear deportation and the separation of their families. Although their own congregation may be a safe place, unfortunately the rest of the Body of Christ often loses out on their invaluable gifts and abilities, because, even in the church, they are hidden “in the shadows.”

What are the first steps a church should take to begin engaging?

Typically churches start their process with demographic research, needs assessments, and planning meetings. Although noble, I actually think in general these are not the proper places to start. Prayer, networking, and discernment of God’s direction toward others already involved in immigrant ministry is the paramount starting point.

Immigrant congregations are numerous and spread throughout the United States, often hidden inside other church buildings. For a non-immigrant church, the place to start is building relationships with immigrant believers: pastor to pastor, elders to elders, members to members. This does several things. It personalizes the issue of immigration. It helps people from different cultures work out natural conflicts that occur within the context of Christian love. It builds a relational foundation that is the basis for any kingdom work. It helps the non-immigrant church recognize that in cross-cultural mission, the language, culture, and leadership capabilities of the immigrant congregants overshadow the value of a facility, finances, and capacity.

Another key engagement step is to connect with church or parachurch leaders in your community who are already involved in immigrant-focused ministry. Coming alongside ministry efforts that are already in motion will accelerate your church’s learning curve and also build important kingdom bridges for collaborative mission.

What are the biggest challenges churches face in engaging this issue and this population?

With cross-cultural relationships come cultural conflict, schedule disruptions, religious disagreements, faith-stretching experiences, and often a disconcerting end to life as usual, on both the individual and corporate level. Confronted by different values, by suffering, by circumstantial messiness, by vibrant faith, by opposing faith, and by a myriad of other differences, our American cultural system gets disoriented in a way that changes and grows our faith.

Proactive church leaders committed to spiritual formation will both initiate and walk through these life disruptions with their parishioners. They will seek counsel on how the inclusion and integration of immigrants into the life of their church need also change their corporate business-as-usual. A Rwandan member of my church who was forced to find refuge in the U.S. believes that God has intentionally sent him to our country as a “prayer missionary.” The suffering that he has experienced in his life is humbling. And the vibrancy of his faith and the power of his prayer life confronts our often “safe Christian” sensibilities.

How does discipleship look different when it comes to immigrant populations? How can a majority-white church best approach this?

Similar to what has been demonstrated in maturing international mission work, American missionaries have learned to strip away the cultural trappings of their own faith in order to contextualize the young believer’s discipleship journey. Where possible, they have also learned to defer to indigenous leadership.

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One day I talked this through with a handful of pastor friends. Each of them was leading a majority-white congregation and was a part of a network of churches I facilitated focused on ministering among immigrant populations living in an apartment complex within a mile radius of their churches. These guys had moved far beyond being afraid of “sheep-stealing,” and we were talking about discipleship in the context of immigrant ministry. One of the pastors spoke for the group when he said, “We need to commit to finding the best possible congregation for this person to be discipled in. It very likely will be in an immigrant church where language and culture similarities trump our role in their lives.” Thankfully, these leaders had met other immigrant pastors who were a part of our network and knew how crucial those leaders’ role was in discipling these young believers.

A majority of white evangelicals say that immigration represents “a threat to American culture and values.” Where do you think this idea comes from? How can pastors and church leaders speak into this?

White evangelicals living in the U.S. need to be careful not to confuse our national identity with our primary identity. Peter refers to the people of God as “strangers and aliens.” Our Christian identity transcends national and cultural origins. As my friend and professor at North Park Theological Seminary, Soong-Chan Rah, says, immigration does not represent the “de-Christianization of American society but the de-Europeanization of American Christianity.”

As humans, it is natural to fear those who are different than us, but God is actually inviting us to enjoy, not fear, those differences. Our Revelation 7, every-ethnos, throne-room-future is prayed for by Jesus: “here on earth as it is in heaven.” We should not be surprised when the Father answers this prayer! Church leaders must initiate biblically-rooted conversations and teaching around immigration that address fear-rooted concerns. Unconfronted fear leaves our churches impotent and uninvolved in God’s mission in our communities.

What is your vision for the church when it comes to this issue?

The “quartet of the vulnerable” found repeatedly throughout Old Testament Scripture is the widow, the poor, the alien, and the fatherless. The New Testament church did not just minister to these vulnerable groups. They were these vulnerable groups. The early church was the church on the margins, not the mainstream. In today’s church, I long to see a God-initiated uniting of class, race, and legal differences that lead us to two things: unity and mission.

What God is now doing among evangelicals with immigration parallels what we’ve seen over the last 20 years with the HIV/AIDS crisis. In the 90s, talking about AIDS from the pulpit was taboo among evangelical churches and leaders. By the end of the 2000s, it was thought to be uncool if your church was not doing something to care for people infected or affected by AIDS. More important than shifting public opinions, however, was the heart-change that God brought about among churches that learned to look beyond an issue into the eyes of a dying mother and her soon-to-be-orphaned children. We learned that in God’s eyes, the equally important impulses of justice and mercy are not in contradiction with one another. Based on testimonies of pastor friends, I believe that God is using immigration similarly to bring about the reformation of our hearts and his church.

How does current or upcoming legislation on immigration reform impact the work of the church? What should church leaders be watching for?

The hope of new, just, and compassionate immigration laws captures the imagination of millions of immigrants in our nation. Believers not directly affected by immigration laws must understand and walk alongside those experiencing the suffering and pain caused by the current immigration system. These believers and their leaders must also advocate for laws that embody biblical guidance about how this nation should treat immigrants.

Should new laws be enacted (similar to the 1986 reform), there is a coalition of evangelical denominations preparing to be on the front lines of the legalization process. Imagine a missionary sent overseas being told that there was a ministry tool that he could be trained and certified in by which people from that nation and all over the world would line up each day outside your door to seek your counsel and advice. This scenario will be played out in hundreds of churches across the U.S. once new immigration laws are enacted.

Are there any legal issues church leaders need to be aware of when it comes to undocumented immigrants in their church?

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Contrary to the excessive vitriol in our country towards undocumented immigrants, being present inside the United States without a valid immigration status is not considered a criminal act, but rather a civil violation. This would be on par with other laws that many Americans break routinely such as littering or speeding.

There is a fair amount of fear and misunderstanding around what a church can or cannot do when it comes to how to relate to undocumented immigrants. Membership, volunteering, and leadership roles are wide open to undocumented immigrants in a church-context. The only legal restriction is that churches cannot employ undocumented immigrants. There is no obligation on the part of church leaders to report undocumented immigrants to authorities. Church-provided programs, services, or transportation provided to undocumented immigrants is not problematic under federal law. In some extreme cases, states have adopted restrictive laws that may limit church's ability to provide some services and transportation, but most of those laws have been struck down or banned. If there is a doubt about your state's immigration laws, you should check with local authorities.

What resources are out there for church leaders looking to get serious about “welcoming the strangers” in their community?

Hot off the press is a new 85-page manual, “Church Leaders’ Guide to Immigration,” published by World Relief. This highly accessible guide is designed around pastors’ frequently asked questions. Our website, www.WelcomingTheStranger.com, offers many other church-based resources: training materials, videos, multi-lingual discipleship resources, Bibles (including audio) in different languages, sermon samples, talking points around immigration, etc. I am also spearheading a growing Evangelical coalition of immigrant and non-immigrant churches in which we “envision the Spirit of God equipping every church to intentionally embrace and holistically empower every immigrant.” To learn more about joining this coalition, go to www.WelcomingTheStranger.com/Coalition.

—DAMON SCHROEDER is Director of U.S. Church Mobilization for World Relief, as well as Executive Director of the Immigration Coalition; © 2014 Christianity Today/BuildingChurchLeaders.com.

Discuss

1. Where are people in our church getting their information about immigration? Where are they hearing about or seeing a Christian response modeled? What could we offer them by engaging this issue more directly?
2. When was the last time we discussed immigration or issues of “welcoming the stranger” in a teaching context? Would this be appropriate? Why or why not?
3. What are the biggest needs of the immigrant population in our community? How are we positioned to best serve them?

ENGAGING IMMIGRATION**When a Problem Becomes Personal**

How one church got involved with the immigration issue on the ground level.

Jeremiah 22:3

Over the past several years, our church, located in Chicago's western suburbs, has begun to engage with the under-resourced areas surrounding us. Our church—mostly middle class, Caucasian families—is embarking on a journey to love our neighbors like Jesus commands. The uniqueness of our situation rests in the fact that our church campus is located right on the border between one of the most affluent neighborhoods and one of the most under-resourced neighborhoods in Chicagoland.

This was the reality 11 years ago when our church building was built, but it was just a few years ago that we recognized that our context presents a unique opportunity. We discovered that this calling would mean bringing justice to broken systems while working to restore relationships to a community torn apart by joblessness, racial divides, overcrowding, and an inadequate education system.

We've all heard it said, "It's not about the destination, but rather about the journey," and that has been true for us. Our journey led my wife and me to relocate in East Aurora, the under-resourced area, because I've found when these problems become personal, your advocacy becomes much more potent.

Hard Realities

Our neighborhood is more than 80 percent Hispanic; many of the families we know are undocumented. These families care deeply about providing a better future for their children and have a deep sense of community with one another. Many are among the hardest working individuals I've ever known, waking up very early each morning, working long into the evening in physically demanding jobs for minimal pay.

We work with many students who have little hope for a prosperous future because of their immigration status. We've seen students who have an A and B average in high school literally give up because they realize that they have no chance of ever going to college (because undocumented students cannot apply for federal loans or grants). If on the slight chance that their family can afford to pay for college, they realize they'll never get a decent job because they don't have employment paperwork.

In our neighborhood, we see low parental involvement rates in the school system. It's not just because our kids' parents are working two or three jobs, and it's certainly not because they don't care enough to get involved. Rather, they live in constant fear that they'll be "found out" and sent back to the land they worked so hard to escape to provide a better future for their children.

As a pastor, and more importantly as a Christ-follower, it's my job to "do justice ... [to] do no wrong or violence to the resident alien, the fatherless, and the widow" (Jer. 22:3, ESV). In almost each Old Testament book, the plight of the oppressed and defenseless is a major theme. God specifically highlights three groups of people who are vulnerable and in need of unique protections: the fatherless, the widow, and the immigrant (Ps. 146:9, Deut. 10:18-19, Ezek. 22:7, Mal. 3:5). Recently, God has given our church the opportunity to be a part of a bigger movement, dedicated to bringing justice to a broken immigration system. Leviticus 19:33-34 commands us to not take advantage of foreigners who live among us. We're to treat them like native-born and love them as we love ourselves.

A National Issue

Doing this in our community is vital, but currently there are 11 million undocumented people living in the United States, holding out hope that one day we'll fix our broken immigration system. I can't merely serve undocumented people in my community and remain silent about the larger issues that have a direct bearing on their lives. I consider now the time for pastors to speak up for those whose voices our legislators are unlikely to hear or heed if not joined by others.

As I see it, the first step is to ground ourselves in Scripture: sadly, just 12 percent of white evangelicals say that they view immigration primarily through the lens of their Christian faith. But Scripture has a much to say on this topic, guiding us both toward love and welcome for immigrants as well as toward a respect for the rule of law. A fantastic discipleship tool to encourage biblical thinking about this topic is the "I Was a Stranger" Challenge. We've challenged many in our church to use this simple bookmark to read one Scripture passage related to immigration each day for 40 days. Others have used the "Welcoming the Stranger" learning group

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curriculum with a small group or adult education class, providing a biblical and missiological framework for thinking about immigration issues.

Looking Ahead

While Scripture does not provide a specific roadmap for U.S. immigration law, it does provide clear principles that can help to inform both how we interact with the immigrants in our communities and how we approach public policy questions.

Church leaders can also respond by loving our immigrant neighbors in our communities, recognizing that immigration presents an enormous opportunity for the church to live out the Great Commission right in our own communities. In the words of Asbury Theological Seminary president Tim Tennent, “The immigrant population actually presents the greatest hope for Christian renewal in North America ... We shouldn’t see this as something that threatens us. We should see this as a wonderful opportunity.”

As churches mobilize to meet tangible needs within the immigrant community—for affordable, authorized legal services, for English language instruction, and for homework help for kids—they reflect Christ’s love and have the opportunity to share the gospel. God is using the movement of people to advance his kingdom, and he invites us to join him in his mission.

—ZACH MONTROY is the executive pastor at Ginger Creek Community Church in Aurora, Illinois; adapted from our sister publication *Leadership Journal*, © 2013 Christianity Today. For more articles like this, visit www.LeadershipJournal.net.

Discuss

1. What practical issues are impacting the immigrant population in our community? How could we as a church help address these issues?
2. Where do we see this conversation happening in our community? How could our church enter into that conversation? What do we have to offer?
3. What could we learn from this church’s experience with engaging issues of immigration?

4 Ways Immigration Impacts the Mission of the Church

Immigration is changing how the Church thinks about outreach.

Leviticus 19:33–34

Immigration is changing how churches think about mission and outreach in North America, and rightly so.

At its simplest, migration is the movement of peoples. Immigration is the movement of people into a place (the opposite is emigration). In this case, I am referring (at times) to migration in general, but in the U.S. and Canadian context, we are primarily dealing with immigration.

People are slowly waking up to the new cultural landscape that surrounds them—a landscape that offers new opportunities for sharing the gospel, but also new challenges to consider. Here are four ways immigration is impacting the church and its call to share the gospel with all peoples.

Immigration Puts Faces on Lost People of Different Races and Contexts

In the early 1900s, the population of the United States was largely made up of people of Western and Northern European descent. Christians would hear of the “masses” in Asia, for example, who are lost without Christ. They would then form stereotypes—really caricatures—about what non-Christian people overseas were like. Churches in North America sought to bring the gospel to those Asian people living apart from Christ. But without many Asian neighbors, Christians perceived of a lost world through the lens of ignorance.

Now, “the masses” are not over there, but they are here. And, they are often kind and gracious people—not the caricatures of a century earlier. For example, I have a Syrian Muslim neighbor just a few houses down from me. My kids play with their kids. We’ve walked the neighborhood together.

Not long ago, my daughter asked how we know that “we’re right” and “Islam is wrong.” I talked about the gospel of grace and about religions of works-righteousness. Back 100, 50, or even 25 years ago she could only have imagined “hordes of lost people” who need the gospel—people she would never see or know. Now she knows Syrian Muslims by name because they live in our neighborhood. Rather than seeing “them” as far away, she wants to know why our kind neighbors need the gospel, when she probably would not have asked that a century ago. Immigration helps us to know people as people, not as stereotypes or caricatures.

Immigration Impacts Evangelistic Willingness

Immigration puts a face on those we are called to reach, which makes evangelism more complicated. As it turns out, many non-Christians—particularly devout people of other religions—are pretty nice once you get to know them! They are not “people over there living in darkness,” but they are our neighbors living in our community. They are people—and not projects. Migration changes the way we view the humanity of people. That’s good, when we are moving beyond caricatures.

It also makes evangelism more complicated. Sometimes we fail to see that people—immigrants included—still need Jesus. Immigration becomes an evangelistic opportunity when it gives us a love for immigrants as human beings (without caricature) and teaches us to have compassion for them (including their spiritual condition), as we would for anyone in need of the gospel.

Yet—and here is the complicated part—it may also talk some out of evangelizing those who, perhaps, we think are not in as much need as we thought. In other words, immigration can and does impact evangelistic willingness. We also have to be willing to think through the questions my daughter was really asking: “How do we know the gospel is true for everyone?” And, “Does everyone really need Jesus?”

Migration Impacts Religious Participation

Migration has always had an impact on openness. In particular, immigration has also impacted religious patterns in the United States and Canada. There are many facets of this reality and too many to examine here.

For example, immigration has kept Catholicism in America afloat. If it weren’t for an influx of new parishioners from other countries, particularly Latin America, Roman Catholics would have experienced substantial decline like mainline Protestant denominations. But instead, the overall number of Roman Catholics has stayed relatively steady, because of the increasing presence of so many Latino Catholics.

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On the Protestant/evangelical side of things, immigration from Asia has made an impact in, to pick an example, evangelicals in universities. If you were to visit the student ministries at many major universities or colleges, you'd find a surprising number of Asian-Americans Christians there.

And, it is not just migration—migration is a mostly first-generation phenomena. However, migration leads to diversity. And, to quote Bob Smietana:

Almost every day, it seems, there's a new story about how "Millennials are leaving the church." But there's a problem with these trend pieces: They aren't true. American Christianity still has plenty of Millennials — they're just not necessarily in white churches.

Indeed.

Migration Opens Opportunities for the Gospel

Yes, multicultural expression has been a boost to many churches; however, migration itself may make people more open to considering the gospel. Philip Connor, a research associate at the Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project, is an expert on immigration and religion in the United States, Canada, and Europe (check out his book here). He's studied the religious patterns of immigrants into Canada and found that when people migrate into a Western society—for example, Buddhists from Southeast Asia—they either become much more devout or much less devout. Few immigrants maintain the same level of religious commitment upon migration. Some of them rediscover their spiritual heritage and build mosques or temples in their new communities. Others come here and are open to change.

From the perspective of evangelicals passionate about sharing the gospel, they are open to the Christian faith because they find that the religious underpinnings they thought were secure are unable to answer the questions they have in a new cultural context. This brings openness to the gospel.

For the gospel's sake, let's consider both the challenge and opportunity that lie before us. In the coming years and decades, we are going to see the percentage of non-Anglo and non-Christian neighbors increase.

What's Next?

We've passed multicultural milestones recently. For example, the majority of school children in the United States are now non-Anglo. This is just the beginning, and it is a challenge and an opportunity.

My hope is that evangelicals will still have a heart for the nations and will engage in global missions. However, my prayer is that we will also have a passion to share the gospel with the nations living next door.

—ED STETZER is the Executive Director of LifeWay Research Division; adapted from our sister publication *Christianity Today*, © 2014 Christianity Today. For more articles like this, visit www.christianitytoday.com.

Discuss

1. How have we seen these trends play out in our community?
2. What do these trends and statistics suggest about the ways this issue will impact our community in the future? How can we be preparing now to respond to them later?
3. To what extent is our church a reflection of our cultural landscape? Is this something we value? How can we work to get closer to that?

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A Clear and Present Mission

Practical ways local churches can step in and help.

Deuteronomy 10:18–19

Several years ago, as Elmbrook Church’s leaders assessed their outreach to the neighbors surrounding their suburban Milwaukee location, they sought to answer two questions: If our church were to disappear, would the community beyond our congregation weep? And what were the gaps in services to the under-resourced in their community that their church could help to fill?

Aware of a growing Latino immigrant population in nearby Waukesha, the church tasked Paco Cojon with finding answers to these questions. Cojon was a recent immigrant himself. His wife, Jenni, whom he had met in his home country of Guatemala while he was in seminary and she was a missionary, had filed an immigration petition so that they could move together to her hometown in Wisconsin.

After spending a year befriending and listening to members of Waukesha’s Latino community, Cojon reported back to the Elmbrook Church leadership that, at that point, few of Waukesha’s Latinos would likely even notice if the church were to close its doors. Cojon also discovered a significant gap in services to the immigrant community in Waukesha: there was nowhere to turn for affordable, competent immigration legal advice. He heard multiple stories of individuals who had spent immense sums of money on attorneys (or sometimes non-attorney “consultants”) to try to resolve their legal status issues or to be reunited with family members abroad—often with no results.

The Need for Affordable, Competent Legal Services

Waukesha’s dearth of immigration legal services is not unique. More than 22 million non-citizens reside in the United States, almost all of whom will need to interact with the federal immigration bureaucracy at some point, in addition to U.S. citizens and corporations who may wish to sponsor relatives or workers from abroad. To navigate the morass of U.S. immigration law, which rivals the tax code in terms of complexity, there are only about 12,000 immigration attorneys in private practice, many of whom charge fees that make their services inaccessible for low-income immigrants.

Unable to afford an attorney, many immigrants accept legal assistance from unauthorized practitioners. Some—imagine a volunteer filling out naturalization forms in a church basement—have the best of intentions but are not adequately trained in the law. Others, with less noble aims, prey upon desperate immigrants with too-good-to-be-true promises in exchange for thousands of dollars.

Storefront “notary public” services abound in immigrant communities, manipulating a false cognate between English and Spanish: a *notario* in Mexico has earned a credential beyond that of an attorney, but a notary public in the United States merely means someone can verify signatures on legal documents, not give legal advice. The results—even when the unauthorized practitioner means well—can be disastrous financially and, in the worst cases, result in deportation and separation of families. It’s not a particularly good witness to the gospel when an immigrant drives by a church and thinks, “Those are the people that got my cousin deported.”

To help immigrants get access to authorized, competent legal advice, the federal government has established a process for non-attorneys who meet certain criteria to practice immigration law and represent clients before the federal immigration service. The Board of Immigration Appeals (BIA), a part of the U.S. Department of Justice, will recognize non-profit organizations (including churches) that demonstrate “adequate knowledge, information, and experience,” who have access to relevant legal resources and technical assistance, and who charge, at most, nominal fees. Staff or volunteers at those organizations can, with adequate training, become accredited to represent clients before the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and, with additional training and experience, immigration judges.

In recent years, Christian organizations, including World Relief (where I work), the Evangelical Free Church of America’s Immigrant Hope, the Texas Baptists’ Immigration Service and Aid Center (ISAAC), and the Mennonite Central Committee have offered the intensive 40-hour training in immigration law that generally serves as the first step for an organization seeking to become recognized by the BIA.

More Than Filling Out Forms

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After learning about the BIA recognition process, Elmbrook Church sent Cojon and Jason Knapp (now Elmbrook's pastor of local mission), and two retired missionaries who had recently returned from Peru, Bob and Ruth Wantz, to one of these week-long intensive trainings in August. Four months later, after also completing the requisite on-the-job shadowing, Elmbrook submitted their application to the BIA for James Place, their storefront community resource center in Downtown Waukesha. Ten months after that, James Place was recognized and fully authorized to provide immigration legal counseling.

James Place now has two church staff members who are accredited by the BIA and three unpaid but highly-committed volunteers, mostly retirees who spend about 20 hours at James Place each week. In the two years since they were first recognized, they have collectively served about 300 clients from 40 different countries.

Elmbrook's legal services ministry at James Place meets a practical need, helping individuals walk through the process of applying for legal status, work authorization, or naturalization, or, for the many who do not qualify under current law, sympathetically explaining that harsh reality so that the individual will not be taken advantage of by swindlers who would happily take their money. In the process, legal counselors also have the opportunity to share why they offer these services—that they are followers of Jesus—and to pray for clients and their cases.

It's not good when an immigrant sees a church and thinks, "They got my cousin deported."

"Providing legal services is more than filling out forms," notes Tim Isaacson, a BIA-accredited representative at Immigrant Hope Atlanta, a legal services ministry based at an Evangelical Free Church of America congregation called The Open Table Community. "It provides an opportunity to listen to people going through complex, difficult circumstances. This is the glass of cool water that Jesus has to offer those in need."

Isaacson's pastor, David Park, concurs: "We cannot simply say to the immigrant family, 'Go in peace, keep warm and well fed,' but do nothing about their physical needs. The church must be a place where their dignity and worth is not based on their documentation, but on the fact they bear the image of God."

Transforming the Local Church

Providing immigration legal services is certainly not a simple, entry-level ministry. It requires a great deal of training and ongoing technical support, notes attorney Courtney Tudi of World Relief, which currently provides support to 12 church-based legal services sites in addition to 19 BIA-recognized programs that it operates directly. Tudi cautions that churches that become BIA-recognized to provide services should also purchase an affordable malpractice insurance policy, as even a well-trained staff person or volunteer could make a mistake that could have serious consequences. The stakes are significant—but so is the potential impact both on the immigrant community and upon the local church.

The Bridge Community Church in Logansport, Indiana, is a compelling example. Unlike Elmbrook Church, the largest church in its state, The Bridge is small. In fact, when Zach Szmara became the pastor of the historic congregation less than three years ago, the church's attendance had declined to about 20 people per week.

In early 2013, when Szmara heard from leaders within his denomination, The Wesleyan Church, about the possibility of churches providing legal services, he jumped at the prospect, hoping it would help to revive his struggling congregation. He trained that summer, shadowed an immigration attorney in the fall, and submitted the church's application for BIA recognition in January of this year. By February their recognition was approved. (Most churches experience a lengthier process, often six months or more).

Szmara now sees clients most Mondays and Wednesdays. In his rural Indiana town, where a pork processing plant has attracted many immigrant workers but there is no immigration attorney, the need is unmistakable. "This week alone we've done ten consultations, and we have six scheduled for next Monday," he told me recently.

Some of those who have come for legal services have returned for Sunday worship services, which are now offered in two languages. The congregation has grown to about 80 regular attenders, most of whom were not previously part of any local church. About half of the congregants on any given Sunday are Hispanic, but Szmara has been surprised by how many new English-speaking, native-born U.S. citizens have joined the church, eager to be a part of the multi-ethnic church that God is building.

The Coming Tsunami of Need

While the need is already great both in rural Indiana and throughout the country, if and when such immigration reform legislation is passed, the need will become "a tsunami," says Damon Schroeder, executive director of

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The Immigration Alliance, a coalition that aims to equip and support at least 1,000 BIA-recognized church-based immigration legal clinics to serve one million immigrants by 2017.

The odds of the current Congress passing immigration reform legislation are slim, particularly after a politically polarized response to thousands of unaccompanied immigrant minors arriving at the U.S.-Mexico border last summer. As a result, President Obama pledged to act within the authority of the Executive Branch to enact limited immigration reforms before January. While no one knows precisely what those reforms will be—the Executive Branch does not have the authority to grant Lawful Permanent Resident status or citizenship, but could allow certain categories of undocumented immigrants to apply for employment authorization—they might affect several million of individuals, most of whom would need to consult with a legal professional to assess their eligibility for any new benefit.

The Obama Administration took a similar (though more limited) action in 2012, instituting the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, which allows individuals who entered the United States prior to their 16th birthday and who meet several other criteria to request a deferral of their deportation and apply for employment authorization, with which they can apply for a Social Security number and (in most states) a driver's license. More than 600,000 individuals have applied so far. DACA applicants have accounted for the majority of the clients served by Elmbrook's James Place, The Bridge, and other church-based immigration legal service providers.

Vineyard Columbus in Ohio, which became recognized by the BIA just as the DACA program began, has completed more than 200 DACA applications. Two years later, the first DACA applicants are now returning to renew their work authorization documents. Beth Watkins, who leads Vineyard Columbus's immigration legal counseling ministry, reports that the ongoing relationship with many of these young people has also been an opportunity to invite individuals into their church community.

With the potential for expanded Executive Action in the coming months and eventually broader legislative reforms, The Immigration Alliance's Schroeder sees an opening for local churches. "Providing trustworthy, affordable immigration legal services is a unique way to live out the Great Commandment—loving our newest neighbors in tangible ways—and the Great Commission, joining in God's mission of making disciples of all nations, right within our own communities. My prayer is that the North American church, which too often has viewed immigrants only through a political lens, would not miss this divinely-appointed missional opportunity. 'The harvest is plentiful, but the workers'—so far—'are few.'"

—MATTHEW SOERENS is the field director for the Evangelical Immigration Table, a coalition of evangelical groups advocating for immigration reform, and the co-author of *Welcoming the Stranger: Justice, Compassion and Truth in the Immigration Debate* (IVP, 2009); adapted from our sister publication *Leadership Journal*, © 2014 Christianity Today. For more articles like this, visit www.LeadershipJournal.net.

Discuss

1. What is our church's witness among the Hispanic community?
2. Where can immigrants in our community go for legal help? Is it affordable and non-predatory? Is this something our church could realistically offer? What would it take to make this happen?
3. How would this kind of ministry reflect our church's mission?

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5 Good Ways to Welcome Strangers

Simple ways to get started and make a difference.

Isaiah 56:6–8

Like many congregations, my church struggles with how to welcome strangers into our midst. We have visitor cards and welcome badges and the greeters at every door, but we stop short of translating information into another language or specifically serving the large immigrant population in our city.

There are obstacles churches face when trying to find effective ways to welcome the stranger. During a recent discussion about immigration in an adult Sunday school class, one man stated passionately, “I don’t want this church doing anything illegal or becoming one of those churches that harbors fugitives from the law.”

While this man might have been more outspoken than most, he reflects the concerns and conflicted feelings many have about specifically reaching out to immigrants. After explaining that most immigrants are in this country legally, I also assured the man that U.S. law does not hold a church responsible for determining or reporting the immigration or visa status of anyone.

I suggested we simply consider ways to make our church more welcoming in general to the diverse population of our city. Here are five things any church can do:

1. Encourage members of the congregation to highlight their ethnic origin.

Make your church a place where people take pride in their heritage and share it. It’s a way to get to know one another. Next time there’s a potluck dinner, invite everyone to bring a dish that reflects their own nationality. Have each person include a place card that names the dish, country of origin along with their name. If there is time, have people briefly tell about their dish and their family story.

In your Bible study or small group, ask each person to share a story of their family and how they or their ancestors came to America.

Ask members of your congregation who are bilingual to wear a badge at church services identifying the language so visitors can feel comfortable speaking their own language. Whether the member learned the language at home or in school, it’s a nice way to highlight the diverse abilities of the congregation.

2. Partner with a refugee resettlement group in your city.

Those who come to the U.S. as refugees are often fleeing war, persecution, or other difficult circumstances requiring them to uproot the entire family and find a new home. Many churches have members of the congregation help an immigrant family get acclimated to their new culture and environment. World Relief is the primary agency working with evangelical churches but depending on your community, another agency may be helping local churches assist with resettling refugees. Here is a list of the government accredited agencies:

- Church World Service
- Ethiopian Community Development Council
- Episcopal Migration Ministries
- Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society
- International Rescue Committee
- U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants
- Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services
- United States Conference of Catholic Bishops
- World Relief

3. Offer English classes to members of the community.

Learning English is a high priority for many immigrants and those visiting the U.S. on a student or other temporary visa. Lack of language skills creates barriers for career advancement and is the primary reason why many legal permanent residents (“Green Card” holders) do not pursue citizenship. Immigrants who do speak

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English often need help with colloquialisms or when required to fill out forms or help their children register for school.

Teaching English as a Second Language classes are available online or through many community colleges. Although it's helpful to have some training, any help will be appreciated.

4. Teach or tutor citizenship candidates.

Millions of legal permanent residents have never become U.S. citizens because they fear they cannot pass the language test or the citizenship test. Free DVDs and study guides are available.

Consider offering citizenship classes at your church. Even those who are already U.S. citizens can learn a great deal about the U.S. and the laws that govern this country. Teaching a six-week class at your church is a wonderful way to open doors to legal residents who long to become U.S. citizens. Attending the swearing-in ceremony for new citizens is very moving and a great way to support the new American citizens in your community.

5. Offer a legal aid clinic.

Immigrants are often victimized by unscrupulous lawyers and criminals who prey on their fears and promise they will file forms but only take their money. Almost every new immigrant has a story about such an encounter.

Simply finding trustworthy immigration attorneys in your area and offering a free clinic on a Saturday would be a help to many in your community who simply don't know where to turn. Lawyers in your congregation can help make contacts or you can contact one of the refugee resettlement agencies for direction.

Business people in the congregation might also offer basic information about finding work, filing taxes, and other skills necessary to become part of the work force.

These ministries to new refugees or immigrants are within the reach of most churches. As my friend Pam says about the outreach program that began a few years ago in her church: "Our church is so much richer now. God has brought the mission field to us, and our church has become a much more welcoming place for everyone."

—DALE HANSON BOURKE is the author of *Immigration: Tough Questions, Direct Answers* (IVP, 2014); adapted from our sister publication *Leadership Journal*, © 2014 Christianity Today. For more articles like this, visit www.LeadershipJournal.net.

Discuss

1. Which of these ideas fit our church's mission and calling?
2. Which of these ideas fit the needs in our community?
3. How can we take steps toward implementing ministries that support immigrants in our community?

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Practical Wisdom for Multiethnic Ministry

3 tips for unity in a diverse church.

1 Corinthians 12:12–30

For our congregation in the Chicago suburbs, multiethnic ministry seems like it just happened.

For years our community was predominantly Caucasian. But then, about eight years ago, things began to shift. A neighboring Spanish-speaking congregation had to leave their building and asked if they could share ours. We said yes. After two years we joined our ministries and became one church. At the same time we had an influx of diverse people who started coming to the church—African-Americans, Filipinos, Indians, a lot of first-generation immigrants. We did not necessarily go out of our way to reach them; God just brought them to the church, partly through our growing commitment to community involvement and holistic ministry.

I'm biracial, so I understand the joys and tensions of spanning multiple cultures. My dad was Asian, my mom was Caucasian. I'm a blend of cultures and genetics. Growing up, I saw racial reconciliation in the home, as the different ethnic groups in our family came together. So, for me, the DNA to have unity and diversity was there from the beginning, though I didn't realize until much later how important it would be for my ministry.

Right now, about 55 percent of our church is Caucasian. Ten to 15 percent are Filipino (mostly first-generation). Another 10 to 15 percent are African-American. And a remaining 10 percent or so are first-generation Italians, Indians, and Latinos. As different kinds of people joined our congregation, we loved and accepted them. But as they began to get settled and become involved in ministry, we realized that we needed to think about how to do multiethnic ministry well.

Diverse Challenges

Multiethnic ministry can be difficult. It's difficult enough to maintain unity and purpose in a congregation where everyone looks just like me. But in a church where there are African-Americans and Filipinos worshipping and serving next to Caucasians, a lot of issues arise.

Tensions surface over cultural misunderstandings in a small group. Handling conflict (when one culture values directness and another values patience and "saving face") is tough. Worship and fellowship events become tricky as you try to accommodate everyone. Decision-making becomes complicated as you have to determine who calls the shots. Cultures need to be preserved, yet unity needs to be real. And if the leadership is not careful, the focus of the church can become about more about diversity rather than the glory of Christ.

It takes a lot of time and energy. But for all the possible pitfalls, the payoffs are infinitely worth it. We have a Lord and Savior who draws the whole world, and we can be a community that reflects what he desires. As a pastor I'm overjoyed when I see African-Americans worshipping and ministering right next to our Filipino families. Or when I see a Latino brother and a Caucasian enthusiastically partner for evangelism.

It is a powerful testimony to our community to say that we don't have to be divided along racial lines, but can be united in Jesus. As the United States becomes more diverse, Christians have a wonderful opportunity to be at the forefront of racial reconciliation, to tell—and show—the world how unity comes through Christ.

The vision is beautiful, compelling, and well worth working for. But that doesn't diminish the challenge for those of us leading local churches. I understand these challenges because our church lives them. I don't pretend to know everything, but here are three things that I'm learning:

Be Humble

Sure, this principle is true for every ministry, not just multiethnic ones. But in a diverse congregation, it becomes absolutely critical. Often in a multiethnic church, one particular ethnic group calls the shots. In our church, the Caucasians tend to be the decision-makers. If you are a Caucasian, this is not a problem. But for those in the minority, it matters greatly. They attend the church yet often feel like they are on the outside—that their voices are not important.

One African-American woman has been attending our church for six years. She is a mother of two children and grandmother to eight. They're faithful attendees and involved in many ministries. She's an important part of our church, but several years ago she said, "This is y'all's church."

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My first reaction was to become defensive. Wait a minute. You are attending this church too. This is your church also! But after chatting with her, I realized that her comments were not about her commitment to the church; it was about her not feeling fully accepted by the church. I am not referring to relationships. We love her. She is part of the church. She is involved in ministry. But full acceptance to her meant that she could share ideas about the vision and ministry of the church, and that we would hear them. She wanted her voice to matter. Yet, as an African-American, she felt the Caucasian leadership was not interested in her opinions. Even though this was not true (leadership was very much interested), it was her perception.

This prompted me to look at our decision-making. So we began to make changes, and asked people from our different ethnic groups to serve in more leadership roles. This decision was the easy part.

The harder part was embracing the different ideas and approaches to ministry that everyone brought. We had to become more flexible with childcare because most other cultures are less rigid than Caucasians. Songs that we normally wouldn't sing became regular parts of worship. Start and end times for fellowship gatherings became more flexible—such as an all day picnic with a Latino organizer.

Each of these decisions involved humility. We had to approach each individual and group humbly. We had to affirm that their voices mattered to us and the church. Then, we had to show them their voices mattered by implementing ideas that fit within our vision. We had to go beyond tolerating differences for the sake of multiethnic ministry to saying—humbly—that we all are equally part of our church, so let's do ministry together.

Maturity Matters

One temptation in multiethnic ministry is to embrace diversity at the expense of spiritual maturity. We faced this dilemma. We wanted to have more shared leadership among different ethnic groups. Many people were willing to serve in leadership. But our existing leadership made an intentional decision to prayerfully discern their spiritual maturity before asking them to serve in a leading role. After all, diversity is an important consideration for leadership. But it is not the primary one. Spiritual maturity is.

It was important for us to maintain biblical qualifications for leadership, regardless of a person's ethnicity. Honestly, it would have been easy for us to promote someone to leadership without evaluating the possible consequences.

Like I mentioned earlier, our church is about 10 percent Latino. We're working to grow our Latino ministry as the Latino population in our community grows. Two years ago we asked a Columbian to be an elder. For us, it was important to have someone on the board to provide wisdom and cultural insight. He was widely respected in the church. After praying about it, he accepted the call. Our congregation sees him first as a godly man and second as a Columbian. The benefits have been tremendous.

He's led us in rich discussions about our ministry to Latinos. He's blessed us with Christ-centered perspective and insight. Because he loves the church, he partners with us in cultivating multiethnic ministry. We chose the right man for the role.

I can only imagine though, what might have happened if we had appointed an elder without considering that person's spiritual maturity. Would he feel a need to represent his ethnicity over and above the needs of the church? Would a faction form if he represented strictly cultural perspectives rather than biblical ones?

Have Patience

In a multiethnic church, decisions take longer, relationship-building requires more time, and ministry strategy gets more complex.

For years, I have been exposed to mainstream church growth models. In many cases, I tried to implement them. But in a multiethnic church they don't really work. The premise of these models is that you choose a particular type of person you want to reach (socio-economic or racial) and then build homogenous ministries to reach that type of person.

But when you are striving to be a church for numerous ethnic groups, you obviously can't just target one particular group. As a result, outreach strategy becomes more like casting a net rather than fly fishing for salmon.

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Several years ago we made the decision to worship in English and Spanish. During service, our songs are projected in both languages, so that both groups are able to praise God together. The intention is to cultivate one body through bilingual worship.

When we first posed this idea to the congregation, there was a lot of pushback. Surprisingly, it was our congregation's immigrants who resisted the most. They stated, "We had to learn English when we came to the United States. Why should we accommodate the Latinos?" While I understood their point, my response was that we are called to be the Church, not the state. I felt language was one area where we could accommodate to try to win others for Christ.

In time, everyone supported the decision. Besides the evangelistic benefit, the Latinos felt affirmed. They expressed joy in being able to worship in their own language. But, it required a great deal of patience. Just to implement this one change, the elder board met to discuss the matter. We held a congregational meeting. I explained to the church why songs in both languages fit within our vision. In order to maintain unity, we had to wait for our congregation to support it.

And every week it takes a lot of time. We have to translate songs into Spanish. The presentation takes longer to put together. The bulletin inserts need to be bilingual. At times, I ask whether it is worth it—we have not seen tremendous numerical growth in Latinos attending the church. But in those moments, I step back and remember that our passion is to see people from every tribe and tongue worshipping together. Numerical growth is not our goal. Multiethnic ministry that glorifies God is.

Let the Gospel Lead the Way

Over the years, I've found some great resources on multiethnic ministry. But I've also read many articles that seem to embrace multiethnic ministry for multiethnic ministry's sake—simply to be in vogue in society, or on the "cutting edge" of ministry.

Now don't get me wrong—I want to be relevant to society. And I passionately believe the church should be on the forefront of multiethnic issues. But I want the gospel to permeate and frame our vision and practice of multiethnicity, not vice versa.

For me, this vision requires a great deal of humility, maturity, and patience. The journey is challenging but the destination is hopeful—to contribute to that vision of restoration where people from every nation worship as one before the Lord Almighty.

—KEVIN M. GUSHIKEN is teaching pastor of Harvard Avenue Evangelical Free Church in Villa Park, Illinois; adapted from our sister publication *Leadership Journal*, © 2014 Christianity Today. For more articles like this, visit www.LeadershipJournal.net.

Discuss

1. Where have we seen positive examples of multiethnic ministry? Where have we seen bad examples? What can we learn from these examples?
2. Does our leadership team reflect the diversity we have (or want) in our church?
3. How could we affirm different ethnic identities in our ministries and services?

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Further Exploration

Resources for engaging immigration issues in your church and community.

BuildingChurchLeaders.com. Leadership training resources from Christianity Today.

- “Ministry to Refugees and Immigrants” Survival Guide
- “Outreach to Other Faiths” Short-Term Missions
- “Practicing Biblical Justice” Practical Ministry Skills
- “Partnering with Community Agencies” Practical Ministry Skills

LeadershipJournal.net. This website offers practical advice and articles for church leaders.

Welcoming the Stranger. World Relief offers resources to help churches engage immigration issues in their community.

Christians at the Border: Immigration, the Church, and the Bible by *M. Daniel Carroll R.*

Immigration is one of the most divisive issues on the national agenda. Fortunately, *Christians at the Border* provides sound biblical and ethical guidance for readers who are looking for a Christian perspective on the immigration issue. As both a Guatemalan and an American, M. Daniel Carroll R. has immersed himself in this issue and as a result presents a uniquely qualified perspective on this topic. Drawing on key biblical concepts, he speaks to both the immigrant culture and the host culture, arguing that both sides have much to learn about this hot-button debate topic. (Baker Academic, 2008; ISBN 978-0801035661)

The Immigration Crisis: Immigrants, Aliens, and the Bible by *James K. Hoffmeier*. Combining biblical, archaeological, and sociological evidence to form an understanding of aliens in Israelite society, Hoffmeier addresses one of the most complex social and legal challenges of the 21st century from a comprehensive biblical perspective. Suggests how Scripture can assist Christians in considering the problem of immigration and in developing biblically oriented public policy. (Crossway, 2009; ISBN: 978-1433506076)

Welcoming the Stranger: Justice, Compassion, and Truth in the Immigration Debate by *Matthew Soerens and Jenny Hwang*. Immigration is a thorny issue. Christians are torn between the desire to uphold the laws and the call to minister to the vulnerable. Citing history, personal stories, and statistics, world relief activists Soerens and Hwang confront us with the current system's inadequacies, suggesting a number of concrete ways to overcome them. (InterVarsity Press, 2009; ISBN: 978-0830833595)