

355. Churches responding to the immigrant reality in Canada: a national participatory action research project

As with other Canadian organizations and institutions, Christian churches are learning about how best to respond to their increasingly pluralistic neighbourhoods and communities. This diversity has been brought about by the arrival of immigrants from diverse world regions. This presentation features a participatory action research project that sought to move churches towards a shared vision in which recent immigrants are welcomed and included. *Churches Responding to the Immigrant Reality in Canada* was a national study carried out by the Centre for Community Based Research, World Vision, and Tyndale University Seminary. An interdenominational and multicultural advisory committee actively guided each step of the project. The purpose of the study was: a) to explore how and to what extent Canadian urban congregations are welcoming and including recent immigrants into their church-life, and b) to determine the strategies and structures that would better facilitate the active participation of recent immigrants within Canadian churches. The study used a mixed method designed that involved over 350 individuals through local focus groups, national and local key informant interviews, a national survey of interdenominational congregational leaders in 9 urban centres across Canada, and 4 community forums. To our knowledge, this project was the first interdenominational national study to do so. The joint presentation by community and academic partners will begin with the rationale, purpose and methods of the study prior to outlining the mechanisms for participatory community engagement. The main research findings will then be presented, including suggestions for how churches can alter their vision, structures and processes to better respond to recent immigrants.