

Innovation Funding Project Report and Student Stipend Report
Michael Wilkinson and Sam Reimer

Project Title: *Christian Churches and Immigration: Integration and Identity*

1. Project Goals

The purpose of this study is to examine the response of Christian churches to the increasingly diverse immigrant reality in their communities. We propose to study Catholic and Protestant churches in one large (Vancouver), medium (Halifax) and small (Moncton) metropolitan area in Canada. First, we intend to identify and study at least three congregations (one from each tradition: mainline Protestant, evangelical Protestant, Catholic) that have successful and innovative immigrant services. Triangulation of methods (interviews, participant observation, and documents analysis) will be used for each case study. Interviews will include both congregational leaders and recent immigrants involved in the congregation or congregational service. The effect of immigration on religious affiliation, congregational involvement and religious identity will be examined. Second, we will complete at least six focus-group interviews (each group will include 6-12 participants purposively sampled for diversity in denominational affiliation, immigrant/non-immigrant status, gender, age, and congregation size), two in each city. Focus group participants will be leaders of congregations active in immigrant settlement. Student research assistants will do the majority of this work from Trinity Western University (TWU) and Crandall University (CU), supervised by Michael Wilkinson and Sam Reimer respectively.

2. Researchers and Students Involved

During the research project we hired two students to conduct interviews and site visits.

Alisha Maskery (4th year Honour's Sociology student, Crandall University) worked with Sam Reimer.

Alida Oegema (MA student, Trinity Western University) worked with Michael Wilkinson.

The student researchers met regularly with the supervisors, received training in Action Research methodology, were apprised of research goals and objectives, met with participants, conducted interviews, made site visits, and made reports.

3. Rationale

This research fits well with the goals of the RDP, especially strand 1 (of which we are members), which is to examine the social construction of social identities in Canada, but also with strand 4, which looks at alternative strategies to manage religious diversity. Specifically, how are Christian congregations managing the religious diversity of immigrants as they offer settlement services? How are the immigrants' religious identities shaped by the cultural and religious contours of the congregations and regions assisting their settlement?

This proposal dovetails with and expands research supported by a SSHRC Partnership Development Grant (PDG) entitled "The role of churches in immigrant settlement and immigration" (PI Rich Janzen), but adds to it by supporting student assistants and by including immigrant interviews that examine questions of religious identity (either of which are funded by the PDG). By overlapping with the PDG, the students receive training in qualitative data gathering techniques from the Centre for Community Based Research in Ontario, and oversight by leading researchers across the country involved in community based research and immigrant settlement. TWU and CU is committed to in-kind support, including office space/computers for students, uncovered travel costs, and costs related to administration (long distance phone calls, photocopies, bookkeeping, etc).

4. Methods

a) Interviews – focus groups and face-to-face interviews were conducted with participants in Moncton/Halifax and Vancouver. Interviews were recorded and transcribed.

b) Site visits – site visits were made in Vancouver to observe a program that focused on refugees. Another site visit was made to a congregation that was involved in a case of offering sanctuary to a person in the process of being deported. In Moncton, a Pentecostal church supporting Congolese immigrants was visited. In Halifax, we visited a Catholic parish with a long history of supporting refugees, and a historic black Baptist church where immigrants from roughly 30 different countries now attend.

5. Ethics Permission

Granted through our SSHRC partnership development grant and Trinity Western University.

6. Summary of Activities

- a) October-December – initial meetings with student researchers, began systematic collection of data, interviews
- b) January-Feb – reporting on project, ongoing data collection
- c) March-April – team meetings, complete data collection, work on papers for presentation at Canadian Society for Study of Religion annual meeting, Brock University
- d) May-July – review findings, complete project

7. Provisional Findings

- a) Three focus group interviews with church leaders involved in immigrant settlement, one in each of Halifax (8 participants), Moncton (4 participants) and Shediac (six participants). Participants included Baptist, Catholic, Salvation Army, Anglican, United, Lutheran, Wesleyan, Presbyterian, and Pentecostal leaders.
- b) In addition to the focus groups, face-to-face individual interviews with key informants included nine church leaders in Halifax, five in Moncton, and two in Shediac.
- c) In addition, six recent immigrants from four different churches were interviewed regarding their experience as immigrants and the church support they received (two Baptist churches, one Pentecostal and one Catholic church).
- d) Key informant interviews with individuals working with new immigrants in Vancouver including representatives from Baptist, Roman Catholic, Lutheran, and Mennonite Brethren churches.
- e) Site visit to Kinbrace Refugee, Housing and Support program in Vancouver to learn more about the various programs, speak with Executive Director, and observer.
- f) Site visit to Walnut Grove Lutheran Church, Vancouver, to learn about the specific details involving a case of political sanctuary with the congregation housing someone facing deportation.

- g) Literature search conducted on various aspects of immigrant settlement and congregations, sanctuary, and refugees.

8. Outputs

- a) Transcribed interviews from key informants
- b) Brief written case studies of site visits
- c) Paper presented by Sam Reimer at Canadian Society for the Study of Religion annual meeting, Brock University – “The Immigrant Settlement Work of Christian Churches in Atlantic Canada.”
- d) Paper presented by Michael Wilkinson at Canadian Society for the Study of Religion annual meeting, Brock University – “The Role of Churches in Immigrant Settlement and Integration: The Case of Refugees in Vancouver, BC.”

9. Finances

Breakdown of Expenses				
Student Funding*				
	Amount	Name	Dates	Project
Student Stipends				
Student Assistantship	9,000	Alisha Maskery Alida Oegema	October 2013 – August 2014	Includes benefits
Research Funding				
	Amount	Project	Dates	Specifics**
Funding for Research Costs				
Funding for Research Travel	1000			Mileage paid for travel to sites
Funding for Administrative/Supply Costs Related to Research				