Pathways to Engaging Cultural Diversity by Canadian Mennonite Congregations

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Abstract

In this article, I explore two deliberate pathways that Canadian Mennonite congregations have taken when actively engaging the increasing cultural diversity around them. Based on three case studies of my own narrative research, these pathways include undergoing organizational change (an internally focused pathway), and creating new community settings (an externally focused pathway). At the heart of these pathways is creative intentionality. I conclude by offering five reflections that combined emphasize that these pathways are but first steps on a longer journey of solidarity with culturally diverse newcomers arriving from diverse world regions.

Introduction

In the space of one generation the composition of Canadian society has changed significantly. The adoption of an immigration point-system in the 1960s and subsequent policy changes, including sustained high levels of immigration, have profoundly altered the face of Canadian society. The majority of immigrants now do not come from traditional western and northern European source countries but from more than 200 countries, especially within Asia.[1] The impact of this policy shift has been a rapid growth of linguistic, ethnic, racial, and religious diversity, most notably in Canada's largest cities[2] but increasingly in smaller centers that have become active in

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[1] Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC), *Annual Report to Parliament on Immigration 2017*. https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/corporate/publications-manuals/annual-report-parliament-immigration-2017.html.

[2] D. Hiebert, "*Ethnocultural minority enclaves in Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver,*" IRPP Study 52 (Montreal: Institute for Research on Public Policy, 2015). http://irpp.org/research-studies/ethnocultural-minority-enclaves-in-montreal-toronto-and-vancouver/.

recruiting newcomers.[3] This diversity trend is expected only to continue as annual immigration targets are raising, set to reach 340,000 by 2020,[4] the highest level in more than a century.[5] Global demographics suggest that Africa, the Middle East, and Asia will remain major sources of immigrants to Canada for decades to come.[6] This changing demographic has also brought diversity to Canada's churches. Newcomers tend to be more religious than the Canadian-born[7] and often turn to churches and other religious communities for material and spiritual support upon arrival.[8] As a result, many Christian denominations have experienced an increase in ethnic diversity.[9] There has also been a rise in the diversity of ethno-specific newcomer congregations. My research has shown that 70 percent of Christian denominations tangibly support ethno-specific newcomer congregations.[10] Even within Canadian Mennonite denominations diverse newcomer congregations are springing up: Hmong, Chinese, Laotian, Ethiopian, and Persian, to name a few.

In this article I am interested in understanding the experiences of Canadian Mennonite congregations that are intentionally trying to engage with this increasingly diverse society. Rather than describing the state of cultural diversity across the Canadian Mennonite landscape, I will instead explore the deliberate pathways that individual congregations take when actively engaging the diversity around them. This type of engagement is at the

[3] Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC), *Local Immigration Partnerships Handbook*, 2013. http://tamarackcommunity.ca/downloads/index/Local-Immigration-Partnerships-Handbook.pdf.

[4] IRCC, *Annual Report to Parliament on Immigration 2017*.

[5] Statistics Canada, "150 years of immigration in Canada," *Canadian Megatrends*. https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11-630-x/11-630-x2016006-eng.htm.

[6] *United Nations World Population Prospects: Key Findings and Advanced Tables* (2015). http://esa.un.org/unpd/wpp/Publications/Files/Key_Findings_WPP_2015.pdf.

[7] J. Hiemstra and K. Stiller, "Religious affiliation and attendance in Canada," *In Trust Magazine,* 2016. http://www.intrust.org/Magazine/Issues/New-Year-2016/Religious-affiliation-and-attendance-in-Canada.

[8] Angus Reid, *Faith and Immigration: New Canadians rely on religious communities for material, spiritual support* (2018). http://angusreid.org/faith-canada-immigration.

[9] P. Bramadat and D. Seljak, eds., *Christianity and Ethnicity in Canada* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 2018).

[10] R. Janzen, S. van de Hoef, A. Stobbe, A. Carr, J. Harris, R.A. Kuipers, and H. Acero Ferrer, "Just faith?: A national survey connecting faith and justice within the Christian Reformed Church," *Review of Religious Research* 58 (2016): 229-47. *DOI:* 10.1007/s13644-015-0245-y.

ground level, not a lofty theoretical abstraction but a practical and even a daily decision being lived out. I should mention that the notion of congregations seeking to interact with Canada's growing cultural diversity is hardly unique to the Anabaptist family. It is not a distinctively Mennonite story.

My interdenominational research has found an increasing awareness and a growing desire among churches to actively welcome and respond to the diversity that comes with the arrival of recent immigrants and refugees.[11] Motivations for engagement are typically grounded in a desire to follow biblical imperatives such as "welcoming the stranger" and "loving our neighbor," and in so doing deepen an understanding of God and of one another.[12] However, in this article I will focus mostly on Mennonites. As a Community Psychologist, I will reflect on how these pathways to engaging diversity are linked to transformational community change. As a Christian, I hope that some insight may emerge on what it means to be a faithful church in today's multicultural Canada. Included among readers of this article may be congregants (Mennonite or otherwise) on the "receiving pole" of the two poles of the global migration circuit.[13] That is, they are established within their homeland and coming into contact with diverse newcomers searching to find place, meaning, and support in a new place.[14] This group could comprise congregants who possess a growing recognition of being from a dominant culture relative to newcomers, and are seeking intercultural exchange that is reciprocal and attuned to asymmetrical power relationships.

Perspective

It could be argued that I am entirely the wrong person to write about cultural diversity among Mennonites in Canada. My family lineage is Mennonite on

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[11] R. Janzen, A. Stobbe, M. Chapman, and J. Watson, "Canadian Christian churches as partners in immigrant settlement and integration," *Journal of Immigrant and Refugee Studies 2016. DOI*: 10.1080/15562948.2015.1123792.

[12] The United Church of Canada. *Vision for becoming an intercultural church.* https://www.united-church.ca/community-faith/being-community/vision-becoming-intercultural-church. 2019.

[13] A.M. Brazal and E.S. de Guzman, The Intercultural Church: Bridge of Solidarity in the Migration Context, Borderless Press, 2015.

[14] R. Loewen and G. Friesen, *Immigrants in Prairie Cities: Ethnic Diversity in Twentieth-Century Canada* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 2009).

all sides for generations. My upbringing was one of sheltered Mennonite uniformity. In the 1970s I grew up in a Mennonite Brethren (hereafter "MB") church in Ontario in which most people had recently arrived from Mennonite colonies in Paraguay and Brazil, sprinkled with a few directly from the former Soviet Union. The German language dominated (High German in the pulpit, Low German in the foyer), even if the church was bilingual. We had two sets of identical hymnals, English and German, and each Sunday we had two sermons—the German one usually longer. If you sang in the choir, as I was given the impression one should, you needed a working knowledge of Gothic script. It was a generous church in many ways, but at that time it did not do well in engaging people from diverse backgrounds. Very few members did not share in the common Russian Mennonite heritage. This may not be surprising, given that beyond language, cultural practices were also nurtured and expected. It was a tight group where most people had relatives in the church or at least knew their place within a social network in which families were befriended for a long time, even over generations and across oceans.

I suspect that my church was not so different from many other ethno-specific newcomer congregations in Canada's settler history. From the early French Catholics, English Anglicans, Scottish Presbyterians, and German Lutherans, to the later Dutch Reformed, Chinese Alliance, Filipino Catholics, and many others, the ethno-specific newcomer congregation has been a prominent fixture across the Canadian religious landscape. And for good reason. These congregations have acted not only as a *spiritual* center providing newcomers of similar background with meaning and hope in the company of co-religionists, but also as a *community* center providing material support and social connections to aid the transition into a new homeland.[15]

Thirty years later, at the start of the new millennium, I found myself in a very different place. Then, as an adult, I belonged to a church that had little similarity with the ethnic homogeneity of the church of my youth. Still MB, not many people had traditional Russian Mennonite last names, none among the various pastors who served there. I suspect that many in the church did not know much about Mennonite history, or were even aware they were

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[15] D. Ley, "The immigrant church as an urban service hub," *Urban Studies* 45, no. 10 (2008): 2057-74.

attending a "Mennonite" church. Instead, the church seemed more intent in reaching out to the neighbors who lived in the surrounding community. Those people were very diverse, belonging to a gateway neighborhood of newcomers from around the world.

How did this shift in congregational cultural make-up come to be? What had occurred so that the church in my adulthood became so much more culturally diverse than the church of my youth? One explanation could be the broader demographic shift within Canadian society that I mentioned above. While Canadian society has indeed diversified its cultural make-up, and this undoubtedly has gradually influenced the composition of Mennonite congregations, there is another explanation as to why some Canadian Mennonite congregations are more culturally diverse than others. This explanation has to do with intentionality, which is what I explore below, namely the deliberate pathways that congregations take when actively engaging the cultural diversity growing around them.

Sources of Insight and Methodology

This article is based primarily on my dissertation's narrative research about three Mennonite Brethren congregations.[16] Each of these churches in their own way tried to intentionally and creatively engage the ethnic, racial, and religious diversity around them. They were chosen for study in consultation with denominational leaders and thought to be exemplars of how congregations could go about engaging culturally diverse neighbors. My research included the triangulation of four methods within each site (participant observation, focus groups, key informant interviews, document review) that each considered three main research questions related to the process, outcomes, and future directions of multicultural church outreach. In total, 34 church leaders and community partners were involved in qualitative focus groups and key informant interviews, with participant observation conducted at 15 events across the three sites. It constituted one component of a larger evaluation of a national program to equip congregational outreach

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[16] R. Janzen, "Reaching out to multicultural neighbours: Stories that evaluate and encourage innovative church outreach." Unpublished Ph.D. diss., Wilfrid Laurier University, 2011. The study was supported by a grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) and approved by the Research Ethics Board at Wilfrid Laurier University.

operated by the Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches.[17]

Secondarily, this article draws on my subsequent research beyond the Mennonite community that provides a fuller context to the dynamics of multicultural church outreach across Canada. These sources include inter-denominational studies on the congregational integration of diverse newcomers, the role of churches in immigrant settlement and integration, research on partnerships between faith groups and newcomer settlement organizations, and research about the link between justice and Christian faith.[18] In addition to this national empirical insight, I also draw on my own experience as a lay leader in a MB church that had active ministry in a multicultural neighborhood of Kitchener, Ontario.

I begin by briefly introducing the outreach stories of the three MB church congregations as I met them in 2010.[19] Next, I discuss two general pathways by which these congregations have attempted to engage with their diverse neighbors, pathways which cut across the three church stories. I end with critical reflections that highlight five key observations related to congregational engagement of cultural diversity. As a community-based researcher committed to promoting transformational community practice, I include implications for future action. Throughout, I link the learnings gleaned from the three stories to a broader literature, including my research with other faith groups, as well as to social systems change theory.

Three Churches
The three churches were located in Vancouver, Winnipeg, and Toronto. All three congregations began their journey into diversity engagement with established and dominant status relative to their newcomer neighbors. Their starting points included Russian Mennonite heritage (Vancouver); Canadian-born Francophone (Winnipeg); Canadian-born from various established denominational traditions (Toronto). All three congregations desired to reach out to the growing number of people in their surrounding

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[17] R. Janzen and D. Wiebe, "Putting God in the logic model: Developing a national framework for the evaluation of faith-based organizations," *Canadian Journal of Program Evaluation* 25, no. 1 (2010): 1-26.

[18] See www.communitybasedresearch.ca for more information about these projects funded by SSHRC and World Vision.

[19] Fuller versions of these stories are presented in my dissertation (see note 16).

neighborhood who did not necessarily share in their cultural norms or ways of knowing.

Vancouver   The first church was South Hill Church, built in 1944 as Vancouver Mennonite Brethren Church. It was the first of many German-speaking Mennonite churches to dominate South Vancouver. In response to changing community demographics, the church underwent a major transformation in 2007. It was then that the remnant of a dwindling German-speaking congregation merged with the English-speaking portion of a MB Chinese church called Pacific Grace, with its Japanese-background pastor. Re-birthed and re-named, the church adopted a vision of becoming a multi-ethnic church determined to reach out to its multicultural neighborhood. For example, it started to run English language classes, hold a pre-school play group, stage international dinners and canning events, and actively participate in the annual community festival. This church's main storyline can be summarized as *Proactive congregational change that responded to changing community demographics.*

Winnipeg   Next is Église Communautaire de la Rivière Rouge (ECRR), a French-speaking congregation located in the heart of Saint-Boniface, the historic French quarter of Winnipeg. The ECRR story began in 1998 as a small Bible study for white francophones. By 2007, the church had its own building and came into contact with the growing numbers of French-speaking immigrants arriving in the city. Helping immigrants to settle in Canada was not something the church had originally planned on doing. Still, church members began to informally respond to the practical settlement needs of newcomers whom they befriended. They established a clothing exchange, bought a van for transportation, engaged newcomer youth in range of activities, started African worship services, and involved newcomers in positions of leadership, including as volunteer pastors. In a matter of months, the size and nature of this church was transformed with newcomers (mostly from West Africa and Haiti) becoming increasingly involved in the church. The church's main storyline could be summarized as *Being open to build relationships with whomever comes across your path.*

Toronto   The third congregation is 614 St. Jamestown in downtown Toronto. This church began in 2005 as a part of the Ontario MB conference's inter-denominational outreach to inner-city Toronto. It was located in the

St. James Town neighborhood of 18 high-rise apartments and a small park. Sixty-four percent of residents were immigrants speaking 120 languages from 90 source countries all within a half-square-kilometer. It was one the city's poorest neighborhoods. The church did not have a building but met in various community spaces. Community outreach was at the heart of the church from its beginning. Informal activities included an annual community festival, barbecues in the park, a support group for people struggling with mental health issues, park clean-up, and interactive Saturday evening worship. More formal activities were carried out in collaboration with community partners, including after-school programs, summer camps, and establishing City Hope, a parallel non-profit organization. This church's main storyline could be summarized as *Living among neighbors in such a way that brings hope.*

Two Pathways
While each of these stories is unique, they hold elements in common. Here I want to discuss two interconnected pathways by which congregations can intentionally engage their culturally diverse neighbours: 1) undergoing organizational change, and 2) creating new community settings. These two pathways emerged following narrative analysis of cross-site themes related to the process of community outreach, and were framed through the lens of systems change theory, which views social systems as interconnected and interdependent and sees the health of a system as dependent on developing and accessing resources that facilitate system functioning.[20] From such an ecological perspective, both pathways imply a change of social system.[21] The difference between the two is in the ecological level of concern. The social system of primary concern for organizational change is the congregation. The neighborhood is of primary concern for the creation of community settings.

      While the three congregations may each have favored one pathway

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[20] E. Trickett, "Multiple-level community-based culturally situated interventions and community impact: An ecological perspective," *American Journal of Community Psychology* 34, no. 3/4 (2009): 257-66.
[21] J.G. Kelly, A.M. Ryan, B.E. Altman, and S.P. Stelzner, "Understanding and changing social systems: An ecological view," in J. Rappaport and E. Seidman, eds., *Handbook for Community Psychology* (New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers, 2000, 133-60).

over the other, it would be inaccurate to pigeonhole each church in any one category. In reality, all pursued some measure of both pathways. Moreover, having two pathways to draw on gave them more flexibility and creativity in engaging with diversity. I will now consider each pathway in turn, using systems change theory as an orienting framework.

Pathway 1: Undergoing Organizational Change
The first pathway is internally focused and involves a congregation deliberately and proactively undergoing organizational change to better position itself to reach out to and impact its community.[22] The underlying assumption is that it is difficult to engage the surrounding community if the congregation does not first work at its own transformative change.[23] Organizational change also has a symbolic goal, in that the change the organization wishes to see in the community is to be mirrored in its own congregation.[24] This pathway is best characterized by the Vancouver church, which went through a formal congregational change process as a precursor to reaching out to its multicultural neighbors.

I have suggested elsewhere that three requirements are needed for church congregations as social systems that wish to adapt to a changing environment and function effectively.[25] The first is to *create vision. Vision* provides direction to the kind of organization that is to be desired, and is cast by leaders who forward their opinions, policies, and underlying principles that should guide the organization.[26] Its goal is to challenge existing attitudes,

[22] S.D. Evans, C.E. Hanlin, and I. Prilleltensky, "Blending ameliorative and transformative approaches in human service organizations: A case study," *Journal of Community Psychology* 35, no. 3 (2007): 329-46.

[23] G. Nelson and I. Prilleltensky, *Community Psychology: In Pursuit of Liberation and Well-being*, 2nd ed. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

[24] P.W. Speer, "People making public policy in California: The PICO California Project." Evaluation report, Vanderbilt University. Human & Organizational Development, Peabody College, 2002.

[25] R. Janzen, M. Chapman, and J. Watson, "Integrating immigrants into the life of Canadian urban Christian congregations: Findings from a national survey," *Review of Religious Research* 53, no. 4 (2012): 441-70.

[26] P. Foster Fishman, B. Nowell, and H. Yang, "Putting the system back into systems change: a framework for understanding and changing organizational and community systems," *American Journal of Community Psychology* 39 (2007): 197-215.

beliefs, and policies in such a way that represents a shift in organizational norms.[27] For example, leaders within the Vancouver church continually re-emphasized a new multi-ethnic vision of the congregation, encouraging members to regularly reflect on how their ministries fit within this vision. In Winnipeg, the lead pastors spent considerable time teaching, preaching, and role modeling an expanded vision of the church that was now to embrace francophone newcomers from Africa and Haiti.

The second requirement is to create social structures that connect people to each other and the resources that they need.[28] Organizational change thus seeks to break down old settings and events that are exclusionary and deny access to valued resources.[29] Structural change encourages innovation to the extent that new organizational structures facilitate new interactions. For example, the Vancouver church renovated the exterior of its building to signal its transition from a setting for German-speaking people into one in which all community members are welcome. Inside the sanctuary, the church discarded symbols long identified with German-speaking Mennonite ritual (e.g., hymnals in the pew, German scripture verses). This indicated a new openness for diverse others to join in and shape the ritual of worship. In Toronto, church leaders developed new and creative structures to generate funds once the original financial support had ended.

The third requirement is to create social processes that promote engagement and enable people to influence the organization itself.[30] Adaptive organizations meaningfully involve people in decision-making and other aspects of organizational life.[31] Leadership development, planning, training, and evaluation are common processes in organizational change.[32]

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[27] P.Y.T. Sun and J. Scott, "Sustaining second-order change initiation: Structured complexity and interface management," *Journal of Management Development* 10 (2005): 879-95.

[28] Kelly, Ryan, Altman, and Stelzner, "Understanding and changing social systems: An ecological view."

[29] G. Nelson, J. Ochocka, J. Lord, and K. Griffin, "Nothing about me without me. Participatory action research with self-help/mutual aid organizations for psychiatric consumer/survivors," *American Journal of Community Psychology* 26 (1998): 881-912.

[30] Kelly, Ryan, Altman, and Stelzner, "Understanding and changing social systems: An ecological view."

[31] Nelson and Prilleltensky, *Community* Psychology: *In Pursuit of Liberation and Well-Being.*

[32] Janzen, Chapman, and Watson, "Integrating immigrants into the life of Canadian urban Christian congregations," 441-70.

For example, in Vancouver a joint planning task group was established that allowed members from the two former congregations (German-speaking and Chinese) to jointly determine the nature of their newly-created congregation. In Winnipeg, newcomers were given the opportunity to assume leadership positions, such as preaching in worship services, joining the Leadership Board, or leading the integration of other newcomers within their church.

To summarize, organizational change is one pathway for congregations to better engage the cultural diversity surrounding them. There are many aspects of changes in vision, structure, process that congregations can reflect on and pursue in order to better welcome and integrate culturally diverse people.[33] Such a three-pronged, holistic approach to congregational change expands existing multicultural church literature (largely from the United States) that typically focuses on singular and narrow aspects of change, such as in cultural awareness or in worship ritual.[34] In short, the three narratives demonstrate that congregations must comprehensively adapt their organizations if they wish to begin to engage their culturally-diverse neighbors in a reciprocally meaningful way.

Pathway 2: Creating New Community Settings
The second pathway to engaging diversity is externally focused and involves creating new community settings, local "places and spaces" that build a sense of community and nurture well-being.[35] They do this by enabling people to connect to resources ("life-giving nutrients") that help them to function better.[36] For example, these settings increase social networks and become

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[33] Ibid.

[34] G. Marti, *Worship across the Racial Divide: Religious Music and the Multiracial Congregation* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2012); J. Nieman and T. Rogers, *Preaching to Every Pew: Cross-cultural Strategies* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Press, 2001); D. Sheffield, *The Multicultural Leader: Developing a Catholic Personality* (Toronto: Clements Publishing, 2005). G.A.Yancey, *One Body, One Spirit: Principles of Successful Multi-racial Churches* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2003).

[35] J. Hill, "A rationale for the integration of spirituality into community psychology," *Journal of Community Psychology* 28, no. 2 (2000): 139-49.

[36] Kelly, Ryan, Altman, and Stelzner, "Understanding and changing social systems: An ecological view."

meaningful when they set into motion a sequence of social interactions.[37] Social settings become innovative when they help to fill gaps of interaction within a particular social system. The agenda for creating new community settings is not prescribed but emerges as church members live among their neighbors and identify what is needed. In more theological language, this pathway sets out to bring community transformation by incarnating the presence of God within the neighborhood.

The three church stories are full of examples of new settings being created. The Winnipeg and Toronto churches in particular demonstrated a high capacity to develop these settings in response to perceived community need. It was a reactive approach, in that the need for new social settings was identified through personal relationships. These relationships were typically informal, developed as a function of living side-by-side among their neighbors. While some call on churches to conduct formal, positivistic needs and resource assessment as a part of community engagement,[38] the narratives demonstrate a more informal, naturalistic approach to such assessment.

Some of the new settings were located within the church's own building. In both Vancouver and Winnipeg, for example, the church building became used for various community activities bringing diverse people together (a parent and child play group, English language classes, and a clothing exchange, to name only a few). Housing these activities within the church caused it to become recognized as a "community center" for its respective neighborhood.[39] However, many other settings were located outside its building (whether led by the church or other community groups). In Toronto, where the church did not have its own building, ordinary places such as a coffee shop, a park, an apartment building basement, or an office of a community organization were transformed into spaces where community members and churchgoers intermingled and even worshiped together.

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[37] J.G. Kelly, *On Becoming Ecological: An Expedition into Community Psychology* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2006).

[38] J. Westgate, "The challenge of being a community church in a commuter society," in *Out of the Strange Silence: The Challenge of Being Christian in the 21st Century*, ed. B. Thiessen (Fresno, CA: Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary, 2005).

[39] D. Ley, "The immigrant church as an urban service hub," *Urban Studies* 45, no. 10 (2008): 2057-74.

Whether settings are formal or informal, church-led or partner-led, those most likely to positively impact neighbors display some common characteristics. I will highlight two inter-related characteristics that seem particularly important within a multicultural context. The first is the fostering of an environment that allows participants to appreciate the uniqueness of diverse individuals. Settings that engage culturally diverse people encourage participants to be deliberately open to the newness that others bring and willing to be enriched by them.[40] Such settings seek to traverse traditional boundaries of history, culture, and power that have kept people separate.[41] Within the church stories this characteristic was often emphasized in discussions about vision and guiding values (e.g., respect, empathy, listening and cultural humility). Indeed, many church members were willing to "let go" of personal preferences and to "put on" the preferences of others.[42] In this way, they demonstrated that while the interactions might be risky with outcomes undetermined, a genuine act of relationship-building cannot leave either party completely unchanged.[43]

In each of the three churches, many examples were shared of how people who previously had not interacted were changed and enriched because of relationships made within these newly created community settings. In some cases, these settings were the gateway for people who previously did not attend church (or had not yet found a home church in Canada) to find a new social network and new spiritual home, and to become active in other church activities including worship services. Some participants made first-time decisions to become Christians through relationships made within these settings. However, despite good intentions, church members did not always express an appreciation of the uniqueness of individuals. In one negative example, a leader confessed how he had inappropriately rushed people towards making "a decision for Christ" at an outreach gathering. He

[40] M. Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1966).

[41] K. M. Peters, "Interculturalism: A preferred praxis of ministry in multicultural settings." Doctoral diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 2009.

[42] G. Parrett, "Becoming a culturally sensitive minister," in *A Many Colored Kingdom: Multicultural Dynamics for Spiritual Formation*, eds. E. Conde-Frazier, S.S. Kang and G.A. Parrett (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), 121-50.

[43] Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*.

recognized in hindsight that his actions might well have jeopardized the relationships his church members were building with community members. According to Volf's "drama of the embrace,"[44] the leader had foregone the "opening arms" and "waiting" steps of relationship. In these steps, the church member signals their invitation to relationship by creating space for others to express themselves and ask questions, and by waiting for others to determine the relational pace.[45] According to Volf, relationships slip into the violence of exclusion and oppressive domination when people fail to reconfigure themselves and their identities to make space for other people. Rather, they "seek to reshape the other into who I want her to be in order that in relation to her I may be how I want to be."[46]

The second key characteristic in making a positive impact within multicultural settings is the fostering of an environment that allows participants to appreciate the common humanity of diverse individuals. Rather than focusing on the particular individual, here the emphasis is on what is universally shared. Settings that embody this characteristic allow participants to sense that together they constitute a part of a greater whole. Participants have a sense of belonging, not only because of proximity but shared experience and meaningful purpose.[47] Stressing commonality enables these settings to minimize differences in status and culture, as interactions are designed to be mutually beneficial and reciprocal.[48]

The involvement of African newcomer youth in the Winnipeg church is a good example. This church became a setting with which these youth keenly identified. They were active in leading singing during worship services and afterwards tossing around a football with others on the church parking lot. The youth leader took them to "normal Canadian-places" (e.g., a

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[44] Ibid., 140.

[45] T. Keller, *Gospel in Life: Grace Changes Everything* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010).

[46] Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 91.

[47] P.R. Dokecki, R.T. O'Gorman, and J.R. Newbrough, "Toward a community-oriented action research framework for spirituality: Community psychological and theological perspectives," *Journal of Community Psychology* 29 (2001): 497-518.

[48] G.V. Nelson, *Borderland Churches: A Congregation's Introduction to Missional Living* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2008). R. Janzen, J. Ochocka, N. Jacobson, S. Maiter, L. Simich, A. Westhues, A. Fleras, and The Taking Culture Seriously Partners, "Synthesizing culture and power in community mental health: An emerging framework," *Canadian Journal of Community Mental Health* 29, no. 1 (2010): 51-67.

shopping mall, a beach, a football field) that acted as settings to connect them with other Canadian-born youth. The message was that in these community places all youth belonged because they all had a common need to belong.

Five Reflections

Below I offer five reflections about congregations that are intentionally engaging with Canada's growing cultural diversity. These reflections are grounded in the three church stories and the two pathways discussed above, but they extend further by drawing on my subsequent interdenominational research. While the reflections describe the current situation, they also look to the future, including suggestions for future practice within Canadian Mennonite congregations.

First, congregations that work intentionally and comprehensively to engage cultural diversity are not so common. While Canadian congregations may be making some efforts to reach out to the diversity around them, these efforts are typically not as comprehensive as those found in the three church stories. In a national survey of 355 congregations from a range of denominations, Canadian congregations were found to be more active in casting vision than in making actual structural and process changes designed to integrate diverse newcomers into their congregational life.[49] Canadian congregations seem to be thinking about engaging diversity more than doing it (or as one survey respondent put it: "our practices have not yet caught up to our values"). I experienced this reality as I worked with MB denominational leaders to identify congregations for study. Congregations were to be selected by "maximal sampling," a term social scientists use when choosing intensity-rich exemplars of the topic under study. In total, five of the approximately 250 MB churches nationwide were identified as potential case studies. The three stories that were eventually selected, therefore, do not claim to be normative of the Canadian Mennonite experience. Rather, these congregations were ahead of the curve in experimenting with how to reach out to their community's cultural diversity. So rather than giving breadth of insight across the Mennonite spectrum today, these stories give depth of insight into possible trajectories for tomorrow.

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[49] Janzen, Chapman, and Watson, "Integrating immigrants into the life of Canadian urban Christian congregations," 441-70.

Second, congregational engagement of cultural diversity is hard work. Dealing with cultural difference can be challenging, especially without the benefit of ample role modeling from previous generations. A national survey of Canadian churches identified what congregational leaders saw as hindering their churches from responding to the diversity around them.[50] At the top of the list was a resistance to adaptation and change, with congregants preferring to be "inflexible and culturally unaware," "ethno-centric," and wanting "newcomers to be like us." Even congregations that had begun to intentionally engage diversity still experienced many challenges, including: 1) the effort required to overcome language barriers and negotiate differing assumptions in such areas as leadership style, theology, worship practices, and expectations of pastoral care; 2) the resources and know-how needed to respond to the many practical settlement needs of newcomers; and 3) a willingness to move beyond the shallow relationship of an initial welcome toward reciprocally living life together. It is perhaps not surprising, then, that I have since learned that all three Mennonite churches participating in my dissertation research have either closed their doors or have changed significantly. My own church recently closed and folded its community ministry into a larger church to ensure that the hard work of engaging diverse newcomers would continue. Nevertheless, I do not view these stories as failures. Rather, I see the churches as trailblazing outliers, what Nelson would call "borderland churches"[51] that do innovative work on the edges (or borders) of what is familiar and safe. Their stories offer two flexible pathways that challenge people to be creative within their own unique context. We need to hear more of these kinds of stories. Their trial-and-error aspect offers insight and inspiration for deciding to take risks toward the direction of diversity.

Third, congregations that intentionally engage cultural diversity require equipping as they respond to God's call. Key leaders in each of the three churches spoke of a very clear (sometimes dramatic) calling from God to lead their churches into engaging the diverse people around them. This is not to suggest that all Mennonite congregations will receive a similar calling (or if they do, not necessarily to engage with such high levels of diversity).

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[50] Ibid.

[51] Nelson, *Borderland Churches: A Congregation's Introduction to Missional Living.*

But the changing demographics of Canadian communities imply that congregations that see their calling as including community transformation will need to engage with increasingly diverse neighbors. However, many congregations do not appear to be well equipped, nor do they receive adequate support from their denominations. Consider the results of a national survey of leaders from Canada's major denominations,[52] which found that while many churches do have some active ministry directed at diverse newcomers, congregations and denominations were particularly weak in the equipping processes of leadership development, training, planning, and evaluation.

Let me offer here a few suggestions that could benefit Mennonite churches in their multicultural outreach:

- Develop theological underpinnings for multicultural outreach that highlight Anabaptist/Mennonite distinctives;

- Support congregations in discerning God's movement within multicultural communities in recognition that God's spirit is active amidst all of human diversity;

- Build the strategic, leadership, financial, practical and collaborative capacity of congregations in adapting to their multicultural context;

- Share stories about learnings in multicultural outreach across churches.[53]

Fourth, congregations that effectively engage cultural diversity recognize a relational niche. Each year the Canadian federal government invests over 1 billion dollars helping diverse newcomers settle and integrate into our communities.[54] These resources primarily fund non-profit organizations to provide formal settlement services primarily for language, employment, and settlement orientation. Indeed, over the past 30 years a new

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[52] Janzen et al., "Just faith? A national survey connecting faith and justice within the Christian Reformed Church."

[53] I discuss these suggestions at length in Janzen, "Reaching out to multicultural neighbours." See footnote 16.

[54] IRCC Departmental Plan 2017-2018. https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/corporate/publications-manuals/departmental-plan-2017-2018/departmental-plan.html.

settlement profession has emerged in Canada, with settlement professionals now able to earn a graduate degree in immigrant settlement. A recurring theme in my research is the value of churches as complementary partners within a highly professionalized settlement sector,[55] and how churches fill gaps left by other service providers.[56] In particular, this research suggests that churches offer something that professional services lack. While interaction with those services is unidirectional ("you have need, I offer support"), what is missing is the mutuality, the give-and-take of relationships, that makes people feel that they belong and can also contribute. Congregations, including Mennonite congregations, can step into this "relational niche" within their community as they rediscover the deeply relational aspect of their Christian faith.[57] The three stories with their two pathways provide considerable evidence that doing so makes efforts holistic and impactful at the individual, congregational, and community levels.[58]

Fifth, congregations that engage cultural diversity require both acts of charity and the pursuit of justice. There is an important difference between charity and justice.[59] Charitable work begins with the individual and moves to the collective, while justice work begins with the collective before coming down to impact the individual. Charity is the giving of ourselves, of our resources, to individuals in need. Many charitable acts were expressed in the three stories by established church members and newcomers alike: sharing clothing, food, vehicles, new expressions of worship, a word from God, to name a few. If we allow these individual charitable acts to happen with scale, over and over again, we begin to see the aggregate impact on congregations,

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[55] R. Janzen, A. Stobbe, F. Dejean, and J. Ochocka, "The role of churches in immigrant settlement." Canadian Diversity/ Diversité Canadienne (CDC) Partnering for Settlement Success: Facilitating Integration and Inclusion. An Association for Canadian Studies (ACS) publication, 2015.

[56] S. Reimer, M. Chapman, R. Janzen, J. Watson, and M. Wilkinson, "Christian churches and immigrant support in Canada: An organizational ecology perspective," *Review of Religious Research* (2016). *DOI*: 10.1080/15562948.2015.1123792

[57] Janzen, Dildar, and Araujo, "Beyond the welcome: Churches responding to the immigrant reality in Canada"; Janzen et al., "Canadian Christian churches as partners."

[58] Janzen, "Reaching out to multicultural neighbours."

[59] See Janzen et al., "Just faith? A national survey connecting faith and justice within the Christian Reformed Church"; N. Wolterstoff, "Justice, not charity: Social work through the eyes of faith," *Social Work and Christianity* 33, no. 2 (2006), 123-40.

neighborhoods, and cities.

However, charity is not enough, especially when relationships are asymmetrical (as many are) including those within multicultural contexts. Doing justice is also needed. Justice—particularly distributive, restorative, and procedural justice—alters how people as a group relate with each other. As the structures and processes facilitating their relations are changed so that they have fair and equitable access to needed resources, relationships can be restored and renewed where individuals can flourish. One striking example from the church stories was how leaders made deliberate efforts to allow new, diverse leadership to arise within their congregations. Creating space for new leaders to express their giftedness had the added effect of drawing in other newcomers—enabling them to feel welcome and become active in congregational life. Both charity and justice are needed when congregations engage their culturally diverse neighbors. While the hard work of charity is giving away our resources to others, the hard work of justice is giving way our position and status so there is room for others to belong and thrive. Giving away in charity, giving way in justice: in both cases we stop clinging to what we see as ours.

Conclusion

Since the 1970s Canadian Mennonite churches have found themselves in the context of increasing cultural diversity fuelled by federal immigration policies favoring newcomers from diverse world regions. Projected demographic and policy trends suggest that the diversification of Canadian society has not yet peaked. The ongoing response of Mennonite churches to it is therefore not limited to congregants of the present generation but will likely to gain prominence in the foreseeable future.

I have outlined two general pathways by which congregations can engage with their culturally diverse neighbors. Whether undergoing congregational change or creating new community settings, at the heart of these pathways is creative intentionality. The underlying assumption is that society's shift towards rising diversity means that churches must be deliberate in discerning new and relevant ways to relate with their neighbors. In this they are not alone but rather are seeking to be in step with, and empowered by, the creative movement of God. I recognize that not all

within the Canadian Mennonite family adhere to a missiology in which local community outreach and transformation are core to the mission of their church. But for those that do, the challenge (and blessing) of faithful living may well rest on this journey of engaging diversity with intentionality and creativity.

The three stories of MB congregations saw this journey as their priority act of collective obedience. They would acknowledge that their efforts were not always effective nor their experiences always easy. Indeed, I was struck with the frequent struggle and loss that their multicultural outreach implied. In particular, I observed the humility and sacrifice of leaders who challenged congregants to stop clinging to the familiar. As churches long recognized for pursuing justice and charitable acts of service, Mennonite congregations generally have the benefit of exploring how to apply this heritage when engaging cultural diversity. But as with the three stories, this can come with a cost. It may cost the giving up of familiar ways of conducting church and of a historical sense of identity. It may cost the giving of time, talent, and treasure in service of others. And it may lead to traditional hierarchies of power being inverted, not merely leveled.

So, perhaps there is a place in this conversation about cultural diversity after all for people raised in Mennonite newcomer congregations as I was. Many can remember the migration experiences of our foreparents as a "dangerous memory" that makes demands on us today. These memories challenge us to be one with the relocation sufferings and hopes of our forebears in "backward-looking solidarity" while walking in "forward-looking solidarity" with migrants who are our new neighbors today.[60] The stories presented in this article provide insight into what first steps on the longer journey of solidarity might look like as we intentionally engage with our culturally diverse neighbors.

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[60] Brazal and De Guzman, *The Intercultural Church: Bridge of Solidarity in the Migration Context*, 4.