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SOLUTIONS

Respondents noted that solutions are often ministries are started within the church to fill the needs of the immigrants, rather than a result of planning or intentionality.

As is other cities, helping with clothing, education and other needs is usually the starting point.

“Work started with the Sudanese arriving at our church, started busing the people to the church and caring for them with clothing, furniture – and that eventually led to a school!”

Another church helped a man from Sudan, who because of his rural background has minimal education but wants to be a pastor. The church is setting him up as a lay leader while assisting with his education needs.

Around special services, immigrants have songs in their own languages, read scripture in their native tongue. Ethnic feasts have also been a great success.

In terms of leadership, one participant said, “Our house groups are integrating ethnic leaders – if we don’t have ethnic leaders, we cannot expect an ethnic congregation.”

On a more individual level, church members to shopping with a recent immigrant. One such volunteer said, “I drive a mini-van, and we go to the store together. I share what the items are (healthy or not healthy, expensive or not).”

But, the participants agree, none of those programs or initiatives compares with simply having a relationship with newcomers, with the leadership leading by example (hosting, etc). “It is important to realize is that it does mean [we] give something up. It is wrong of us to think that they are to just join us where we are.

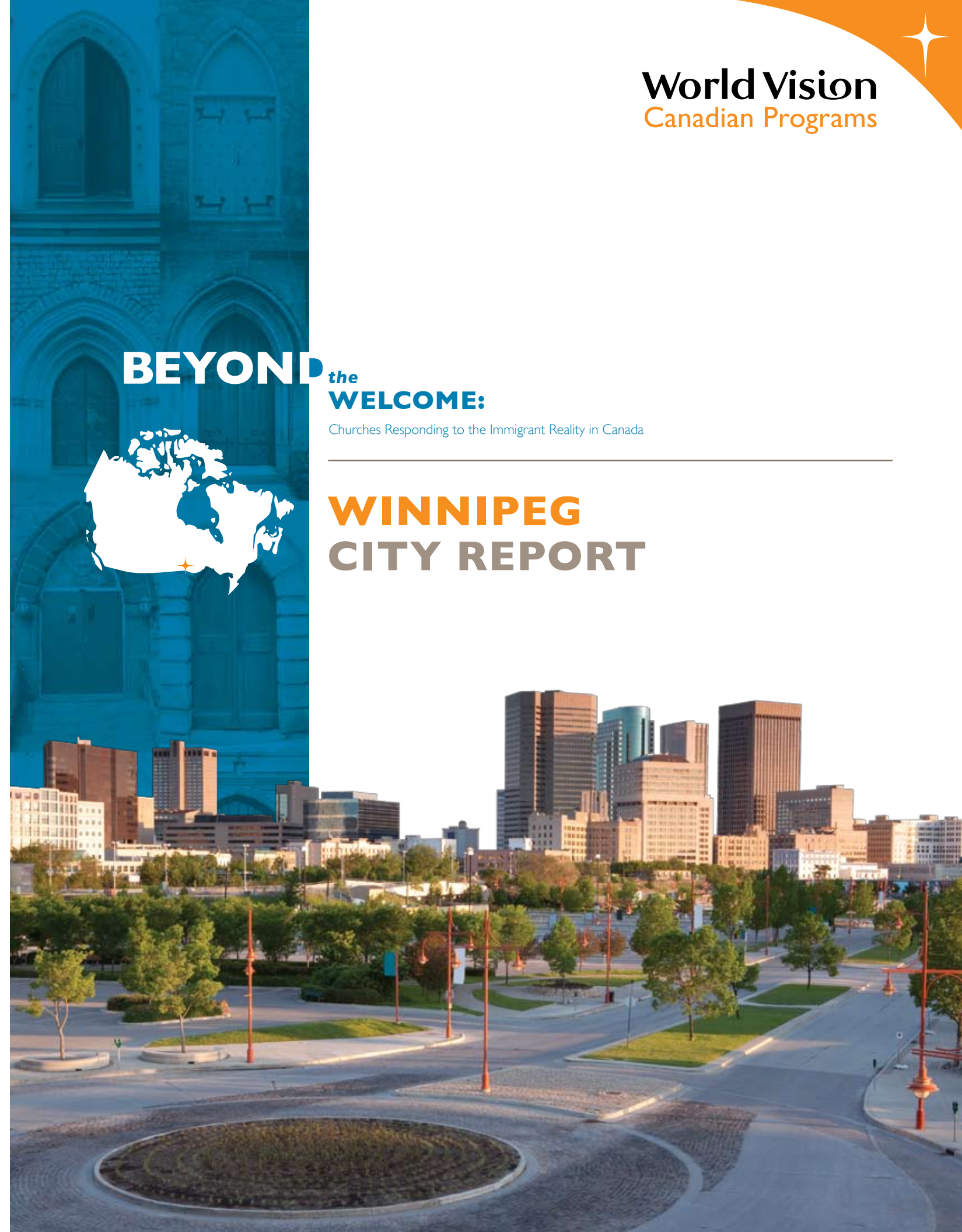


“If we seek to lose some things in order to become richer in what God wants us to do, we see the rewards”

BEYOND *the* **WELCOME:**

Churches Responding to the Immigrant Reality in Canada

WINNIPEG
CITY REPORT





Beyond the Welcome in Winnipeg



Research participant responses

Beyond the Welcome: Churches Responding to the Immigrant Reality in Canada is a research project that involved over 300 church leaders in cities across Canada. At the heart of the study was a desire to know how new immigrants experience church in Canada and what churches can do to be more welcoming and inclusive. New immigrants to Canada face the limitations of poverty to a disproportionate degree. We believe that Churches can be community leaders in addressing this inequality.

Answers to questions of how new immigrants can become integrated into Canadian churches are urgently needed, given that within the space of a single generation, the cultural face of Canadian society has been transformed by the arrival of new immigrants, especially in Canada's urban centres. While every journey to Canada is unique, they all have much in common: navigating in a new society is challenging and often exhausting. Immediate basic needs, such as housing, employment and language learning, must be met. The church can play an active role in this process by intentionally engaging new immigrants' needs and creating places for them in our church communities.



It's a challenge to get North Americans to take newcomers into their hearts and their homes – versus simply assisting them, according to participants.

Participants in this study noted that many Canadian churches are welcoming of people from other cultures, especially during Sunday morning services. But getting beyond a Sunday-morning welcome has been proven more difficult. Participants reported positive things happening in churches, but often these were too few and far between. Those from established majority culture churches admit it's a struggle.

Churches with visionary leaders who highlight immigration needs and model relationship-building are the most likely to successfully integrate new immigrants. Demonstrating intentionality in planning how to be more inclusive was reported to be essential. This may include hosting cross-cultural events with opportunities for social interaction; recruiting multi-lingual church staff, providing translation of worship materials and partnering with other churches and organizations to meet larger scale challenges. As churches get better at integrating recent immigrants into the life of the church, they are also likely to go out into their neighbourhoods to run community programs that respond to the needs of new immigrants.

DEMOGRAPHICS:

- According to the 2006 Census, the foreign-born population in Winnipeg Metropolitan Area grew by 10% between 2001 and 2006. This outpaced the area's total growth which increased by 3% in the same period.
- As of 2006, the foreign-born population was 121,300 or 18% of the total population, up slightly from 17% in 2001 (Statistics Canada, 2007).
- In 2006, 32% of the population identified themselves as Catholic, 34% Protestant, 2% Orthodox, and 4% other Christian denominations (Statistics Canada, 2010).
- Forty percent of children in recent immigrant families in Manitoba live in poverty (Social Planning Council of Winnipeg).



WINNIPEG SPOTLIGHT: City Church

City Church in Winnipeg takes intercultural communication seriously. The congregation of some 240 people worship together in several languages, with the teaching shared between a Canadian born pastor and a pastor of Burmese descent. The church also offers a wide range of social services to immigrants through 'City Connections', a separate facility operated by the church. For more information please visit: www.citychurchwinnipeg.org

CHALLENGES:

- Participants in the study in Winnipeg noted a number of family-related challenges involved in integrating recent immigrants into the church. "We have run into families who function in 'crisis-mode,'" said one participant, for instance "someone who beats their spouse. We have to turn this in to the police, where as they turn a blind eye."
- Another participant noted that with newcomers, raising children is seen as a corporate responsibility. "This is a challenge," said one participant. "Some of the children have tempers." Culturally, "they expect you to care for and discipline their children."
- "They don't treat church as a spectator sport," on respondent said. Church is not just an option. It is often their entertainment, their activities. Meetings are often several hours and involve great participation. It is a bit of a culture shock for them to come into our cultural Christian culture. In worship, many newcomers, particularly those from Africa, come with musical gifts and often miss their cultural music.
- But the biggest challenge appears to be personal relationship-building between North Americans and newcomers. It's a challenge to get [North Americans] to take [newcomers] into their hearts and their homes – versus simply assisting them, according to participants. There has been some hesitancy to bring them into their homes, however, it is such a blessing to the immigrants.
- And that starts with church leaders. "If the leaders/pastors are not modeling this – it is not really in his heart – it is probably not going to happen. Once it is in his heart, and he makes friends with immigrants and refugees, he then has authority."