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## Welcoming and Belonging: Voice, Acceptance and Purpose

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## Welcoming and Belonging: Voice, Acceptance and Purpose

Kevin Driver<sup>1</sup>

### Core Question

What space or role can a church create for ministry by bringing together the established community and newcomers (i.e. recent immigrants)?

### Abstract

Immigration in Canada is a fact of history and it will continue to be an integral part of Canada's future. Many churches in rural Canada are uniquely positioned to be on the frontline in welcoming and creating belonging as many rural areas and small towns are seeking growth from the outside, from either migrant or immigrant journeys.<sup>2</sup> My research examined the space or role a church can create for ministry by bringing together the established community and the newcomers (recent immigrants). By measuring voice, acceptance and purpose against the backdrop of Welcoming and Belonging we demonstrated a tool for the local church to use in measuring levels of integration in a local community. The research demonstrated that a church, by example, can come alongside the larger community to help create stronger community between established residents and newcomers.

An hour's drive west from Calgary the mountains rise on every side inviting people to the Bow Valley and the Town of Banff (TOB); here we find Banff's Full Gospel Church (BFGC). We looked at our own journey in voice, acceptance and purpose and, through the use of surveys, interviews and focus groups, identified Welcoming and Belonging in selected stories found in the bible and in the stories of recent immigrants and established residents of BFGC in the Bow Valley.

Located in a tourist town, BFGC has always had an ever-changing international visitor population. The influx of Temporary Foreign Workers (TFW) in 2006 saw more people staying for longer periods of time and more nationalities beginning to appear in the congregation. The make-up of the church in 2006 was fifty-six regular attendees from nine different nationalities and five different languages. In 2015, at the time of this study, there were eighty-eight regular attendees from twenty-three different nationalities and twelve different languages. Now, in 2019, Banff is a community comprised of over ninety-one different nationalities and the church continues to reflect that diversity among attendees.

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<sup>2</sup> "Immigrants in Rural Canada: 2006," *Rural and Small Town Canada: Analyst Bulletin* (StatCan.gc.ca. Vol. 8 No. 2), 2.

## Theological Foundation and Thoughts that Guided the Project

I practice the hospitality of God with my church because God reached out to me while I was yet a sinner. I was once an alien, a stranger from God. I too came one day into God's presence in celebration and declared God's grace by acknowledging, "My father was an Aramean" (Deut 26:5). Because of my personal experience, now I can befriend strangers and neighbours; I can be a guest and a host. The Holy Spirit is at work in, through and around me, and does the work I cannot do. I am to live, to love and to seek truth. So, I willingly embrace the widow, orphan and stranger and I am willing to "entertain angels unawares" (Heb 13:2). I can trust God for what the future will look like.

### Culture

The differences between social groups, in terms of what they value, are often differences between their cultures and what people call 'culture.' Yet, these differences are not static. Culture shapes daily life experiences and, in turn, arises from those experiences. Immigrants who come to Canada from other cultures, regardless of the cultural differences between them, will often experience Canadian culture as something foreign; something to which they must learn to adapt. Thus strangers, regardless of place of origin, may have similar values, issues and behaviours in relation to Canadian culture.

Mariel Guina, a family reunification specialist, refers to culture when she says, "The basic difference is on the prevalence, intensity, and threshold."<sup>3</sup>

- Prevalence is viewed as the degree of acceptance or experience a person or group has had with a value, issue, or behaviour.
- Intensity is the strength of the impact or importance a person or group places on the value, issue, or behaviour.
- Threshold is how quickly a person or group perceives a value, issue or behaviour.

From this, we may conclude that culture is the prevalence, intensity and threshold of values, issues and behaviours that like-minded people share as the result of daily life experiences.

### Intercultural

It is important to define what we mean by culture, because as a church we have intentionally chosen what we call an 'intercultural' approach. We have intentionally embraced each other even though we have a diversity of people with a diversity of prevalence, intensity, and threshold, who have a diversity of ways of expressing values, issues, and behaviours. Thus, we discovered that a different approach to ministry is required in our rural, small-town church with its many types of immigrants and nationalities, and where there are insufficient numbers to form an ethnocentric church. This left us with a need to find a working definition of what it means to be intercultural.

To arrive at a new understanding of being intercultural is not perfect, nor is it easy – we are a work-in-progress. Paul describes it thus, "But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us" (2 Cor 4:7). We have come to understand the intercultural church as one that intentionally embraces one another

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<sup>3</sup> Mariel Guina, "Positive Diversity at Work: Exploring Filipino Behavior Through Its Culture." Town of Banff Settlement Services Workshop (December 14, 2014), 1.

as a diversity of people and demonstrates a willingness to consider an open-ended future as a reflection of what Welcoming and Belonging can look like in the communities we serve.

### Welcoming and Hospitality

Choosing to be intercultural does happen because we want it to be so, rather, after the initial desire, the real work begins. I believe immigration has had and will continue to have an important role to play in the revival of the Christian church in Canada. Daniel Carroll supports this concept by saying, “From its inception Christianity has been a mobile faith, always on the move.”<sup>4</sup> As I examined immigration in Canada, I saw a pattern of something bigger than I imagined, that is, in Canada’s history the church grew with each wave of immigration: “While many mainline and even evangelical churches are declining in membership, those focusing on immigrants and new Canadians are growing.”<sup>5</sup> Our Christian identity should not be threatened by the arrival and presence of newcomers, rather, newcomers are fundamental to understanding our meaning in the practice of Welcoming and Hospitality.

Webster’s Dictionary defines Welcoming this way: “to greet hospitably and with courtesy or cordiality and to accept with pleasure the occurrence or presence of.”<sup>6</sup> Esses, et. al., in *Characteristics of a Welcoming Community*, define welcoming in two dimensions. Welcoming, in a spatial dimension, is a “physical location in which newcomers feel valued and their needs are served.”<sup>7</sup> Welcoming, in a second dimension, is a continued discourse where a welcoming community is “a collective effort to create a place where individuals feel valued and included, more than a one-time event, able to reproduce and sustain actions.”<sup>8</sup> A welcoming community is one that identifies and removes barriers, promotes a sense of belonging, meets diverse individual needs, and offers services that promote successful integration. Successful integration is the mutual ability to contribute, free of barriers, to every dimension of Canadian life – economic, social, cultural and political.<sup>9</sup>

Within Welcoming and Belonging we find a limiting factor in our service and mission as a church. A stranger may now be a guest, but when does a guest stop being a guest and join with you in hosting? When does one actually belong?

The church can be welcoming when it shows hospitality, but the church needs to be aware to what degree the people in the church are willing for others to belong. Of course, there is the other side: to what degree do new immigrants want to belong?

### Welcoming and Belonging

Belonging is a basic human need and individuals meet this need through interpersonal experiences. Belonging is a series of social interactions, experiences and relationships where people discern the ability or suitability of a given situation or place as

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<sup>4</sup> Daniel Carroll, *Christians at the Border: Immigration, the Church, and the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 61.

<sup>5</sup> Debra Fieguth, “Training Immigrant Pastors,” *Faith Today* (May/June 2013), 24. (Quoting Robert Cousins).

<sup>6</sup> *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*, 11th ed., s.v. “welcoming,” accessed April 15, 2015. [www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/welcoming](http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/welcoming).

<sup>7</sup> Victoria Esses et. al., “Characteristics of a Welcoming Community: Policy Implications and a Research Agenda,” *Welcoming Communities Initiative* (Citizen and Immigration Canada, 2013), 3. (ppt notes).

<sup>8</sup> Esses et al, “Characteristics of a Welcoming Community,” 3.

<sup>9</sup> Esses et al, “Characteristics of a Welcoming Community,” 4-5.

appropriate or safe, given their social station in life and their desired position in the future in light of their life experience.

To paraphrase Richard Janzen in *Beyond the Welcome*, the freedom to belong means a degree of autonomy – the ability to make your own choices, the ability to socially engage, express hope, and be motivated to achieve dreams and goals. Immigrants often feel a limited sense of belonging. Though they generally feel welcomed, that welcome is limited and lacks depth, and is not extended to acceptance into leadership and decision-making positions. Immigrants feel that their talents, gifts, and skills are underused and, as they struggle to settle in a new community, will often not make time for church activities or involvement in church leadership roles. Things like job-searching, holding down survival jobs, and frequent mobility to find the right place to live take their time and energy leaving no time for critical, fulfilling involvement. The lack of involvement and inclusion is why many recent immigrants choose ethno-specific congregations.<sup>10</sup> Janzen states that a main issue is the “western churches focus on structure, governance and policy. Immigrants focus on relationship, spirit and celebration.”<sup>11</sup>

Our journey in ministry at BFGC has led us to being international in focus and being what we call the “Forever Family.” Church leadership is committed to the continued exploration of what it means to be an intercultural church. BFGC was originally founded by an immigrant to provide more than a Sunday service by encouraging people to engage and live their faith daily and practically in prayer, bible reading, holy living, and in their personal relationships.

## Research and Methodology

Because of changes in BFGC and the Bow Valley with more and more TFW's immigrating and staying longer, we saw the need to sharpen our focus in an effort to find out what was working and why, so we could strengthen and improve our ministry. We wanted to discover and quantify some underlying principles so we could understand why integration seems to be working at BFGC at a different level than in the TOB as a whole. We used the assumption of Appreciative Inquiry (AI), “that every organization or community has many ‘untapped and rich accounts of the positive.’ ... [In] AI, human systems grow in the direction of what they persistently ask questions about.”<sup>12</sup> Thus, we needed to give our people the opportunity to network and create a common technical language.

## Literature Review

A literature review gave us the chance to consider the issues we wanted to cover and to look for items of interest we may have overlooked. This would include, for example, a review of the retention of immigrants and secondary migration.

Studies show that the first two years in a new town are the most critical in determining the retention and integration of immigrants. 23% of immigrants in Alberta

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<sup>10</sup> Richard Janzen, “Beyond the Welcome: Churches Responding to the Immigrant Reality in Canada,” (Final Research Report 2010), 17-19. Accessed December 10, 2014. [www.communitybasedresearch.ca/Page/View/Publications\\_Resources](http://www.communitybasedresearch.ca/Page/View/Publications_Resources).

<sup>11</sup> Janzen, “Beyond the Welcome,” 17.

<sup>12</sup> David L. Cooperrider and Diana Whitney, “Appreciative Inquiry: A Positive Revolution in Change.” *The Change Handbook – The Definitive Resource on Today's Best Methods for Engaging Whole Systems*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition (San Francisco: Berrett-Kiehl Publishers, 2007), 75.

moved into small towns, and within five years, 27% of those immigrants moved out of small towns. Compared to non-immigrant residents, immigrants are more likely to both migrate into and out of a small town.<sup>13</sup> According to Rene Houle, the people at the highest risk to leave within two years are those who had little or no say on their choice of location.<sup>14</sup> Moving out of rural locations (i.e. population centers under 30,000) is most pronounced with up to 30% of the immigrant population moving out within two years, and 15% of that immigrant population moving out within the first six months.<sup>15</sup> To make a comparison, if you, as an immigrant, live outside of Canada's three biggest cities, you are five times more likely to move in the first two years. If you are in a smaller community you are twice as likely to move as a person in a community larger than 30,000. This means that as an immigrant in a small town you are ten times more likely to move than immigrants in Canada's larger cities.

Retention tends to be controlled by three factors: economic, social and political opportunities. Retention is a sobering obstacle in small town and rural growth. When new growth comes, the question is, will it last? The good news is that after two years in Canada, the immigrant is likely to move at the same rate as the general population. Family reunification is an exception to this rule because when a family is together the moving rate drops almost immediately to that of the general population.<sup>16</sup> The positive aspects of life in rural areas include a safe and relaxed atmosphere, helpful neighbors, and the perception that it is a good place to raise children. We have found this to be true in Banff.

## Surveys

We divided our survey into two parts: Welcoming and Belonging. We called the survey for those who are long-term residents "Welcoming," and we called the survey for those who arrived within the last five years "Belonging." We based our survey questions on the Bow Valley Immigration Partnership (BVIP) *Integration Assessment 2014* in an effort to quantify some of the differences and similarities between the church and community. We asked questions within our own context and formed a number of relevant questions that were the same in both surveys. There were also questions that were unique to each survey. These questions enabled us to look at ourselves more closely. Our unique questions in the "Belonging" survey helped us identify those who planned to stay in the community for a significant period of time (10+ years) and who would consider going further in the research through interviews or focus groups.

The BVIP survey was based on a study of three documents. The first document, the MIPEX Canada,<sup>17</sup> is an international study that rates nations on seven different immigration issues. In 2010 Canada ranked third in the world for being an immigration-friendly country but that ranking is expected to drop sharply because of recent policy changes.<sup>18</sup> The second

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<sup>13</sup> "Immigrants in Rural Canada: 2006," 14-15.

<sup>14</sup> Rene Houle, "Secondary Migration of New Immigrants to Canada," (*Our Diverse Cities* 3, 2007), 18. Accessed December 09, 2014. [http://canada.metropolis.net/publications/odc\\_e.html](http://canada.metropolis.net/publications/odc_e.html).

<sup>15</sup> Houle. "Secondary Migration," 20.

<sup>16</sup> Houle, "Secondary Migration," 16, 24.

<sup>17</sup> [www.mipex.eu/canada](http://www.mipex.eu/canada) accessed April 20, 2015.

<sup>18</sup> See article by Morton Beiser and Harald Bauder, accessed April 20, 2015.

[www.thestar.com/opinion/commentary/2014/05/12/canadas\\_immigration\\_system\\_undergoing\\_quiet\\_ugly\\_revolution.html](http://www.thestar.com/opinion/commentary/2014/05/12/canadas_immigration_system_undergoing_quiet_ugly_revolution.html).

document, the *Alberta Settlement Outcomes Survey* completed in 2013,<sup>19</sup> is a telephone survey of 1006 adult immigrants throughout Alberta who have been in the province less than 60 months. This survey looked at how immigrants felt about their experiences with available community services, their access to information from social agencies, and their economic and social integration. The third document that influenced the design of the local surveys was the *Characteristics of a Welcoming Community*. This study reviewed 200 scholarly articles, chapters, and government and community reports in order to examine best practices and identify seventeen characteristics of a welcoming community. Both Ravenara<sup>20</sup> and Esses, et al., divide the characteristics of this document in three ways: 50% economic, 25% social, and 25% political. They weighted economics as being twice as important as the other two characteristics because if economics is weak then the other two will be equally weak.<sup>21</sup> A question that has not been answered is this: Can we compensate for low economic scores if the political and social scores are strong?

## Interviews

From the 46 surveys completed we conducted twelve interviews. As we wrote the interview questions, the ministry team struggled with how to respect the respondents' stories and still cover the topic of Welcoming and Belonging. We designed the questions to be a gift of telling their story because, as Marquardt says, "It is important that people see themselves as part of the solution rather than the problem. So we ask reflective questions, framing our questions as gifts."<sup>22</sup>

## Sermons

Since "many immigrants interpreted their migration experience through the lens of their religious beliefs,"<sup>23</sup> we structured sermons to assist immigrants to translate their faith in terms of their new reality so they could provide meaning for some significant events in their lives. Thus, strategic preaching around immigrant issues helped give voice and vocabulary to their experience. Lee, in *Marginality*, shares a cycle of common emotions that he believes all newcomers work through to varying degrees – rejection, humiliation, alienation, loneliness, nothingness, and all-ness (embracing all of the above and knowing God has placed you exactly where God wants you to be). Then comes a vision of new life where a future and a hope emerges.<sup>24</sup>

Sixteen sermons were strategically chosen to reflect immigration needs, identity, family issues, and the bigger theme of Welcoming and Belonging. Many of the topics for the

<sup>19</sup> Victoria Esses, et al., *Alberta Settlement Outcomes Survey*. Alberta Human Service (2013), 4. Accessed April 20, 2015. <http://work.alberta.ca/documents/alberta-outcomes-settlement-survey-results.pdf>.

<sup>20</sup> Zenaidia Ravanera, Victoria Esses, and Rajulton Fernando, "Integration and 'Welcome-ability' Indexes: Measures of Community Capacity to Integrate Immigrants," Population Change and Lifecourse Strategic Knowledge Cluster Discussion Paper Series/ Un Réseau stratégique de connaissances Changements de population et parcours de vie Document de travail, Vol. 1: Issue 1, Article 6. (2013), 13. Accessed April 22, 2015. <http://ir.lib.uwo.ca/pclcl/vol1/iss1/6>.

<sup>21</sup> Esses, et al., "Characteristics of a Welcoming Community," 5.

<sup>22</sup> T. Jensey, executive book summary of: Michael Marquardt, *Leading with Questions: How Leaders Find the Right Solutions by Knowing What to Ask*, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005), 84.

<sup>23</sup> Stobbe, "Literature Review," 7. See also Gregory Baum, "The Limits of Multiculturalism," *The Ecumenist*, Vol. 46/1 (2009), 22-23.

<sup>24</sup> Lee, Jung Young. *Marginality: The Key to Multicultural Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 164-170.

sermons came out of a community agency meeting where different community stakeholders shared their thoughts about the areas where we were finding gaps. The purpose behind the sermons was to open dialogue about issues that people in the church were experiencing but struggling to understand and articulate. The intent was to give people the opportunity to address what is hard to talk about. For instance, as a church, we are very aware of the pain and issues created by the average 4.3 years of family separation among the immigrant population<sup>25</sup> followed by family reunification that takes place away from the trusted and well-known supports found in home cultures.

Many of the issues addressed in the sermons were found within our own congregation and all the issues were found within our circles of influence in the community or workplace. Using a narrative style and focusing on emotions, I told stories to see how others moved forward with God. The focus was not to blame or shame but to find practical advice from God's word that allowed people to become 'unstuck' by giving vocabulary, voice and, in God's grace, to equip people to move forward and continue to experience a blessed life in God's kingdom.

### Conversation Café

We organized a focus group and called it a *Conversation Café*. It was based on a methodology called World Café<sup>26</sup> – a simple way to make visible collective intelligence and to help create and increase collective capacity for effective action using conversation. World Café assumes that “people already have within them the wisdom and creativity to effectively address even their most difficult challenges....Throughout history, new ideas have been born through informal conversations in cafes, salons, pubs, places of worship, kitchen tables, and living rooms.”<sup>27</sup>

We adapted the World Café to a *Conversation Café* because we wanted to cover more than one topic. Our purpose for the evening was to create conversations that would leave people with concrete ideas for next steps in attaining their dreams and goals in the Bow Valley: realistic expectations and desires to move forward in attaining goals that would allow people to stay longer in the community. Our topics of conversation covered the areas of housing, personal development, finances, and self-care.

### Summary of Learning

The power to speak, to tell one's own story, is integrally related to the power to change.  
– Mary Clark Moschella<sup>28</sup>

We now turn our attention to what these methodologies brought to our understanding of voice, acceptance and purpose as part of Welcoming and Belonging.

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<sup>25</sup> Megan Stewart, “Immigration Assessment 2014: Building a Welcoming Community,” (Banff: Bow Valley Immigration Partnership, 2014), 9.

<sup>26</sup> Juanita Brown, Ken Homer, and David Issacs, “World Café,” *The Change Handbook—The Definitive Resource on Today's Best Methods for Engaging Whole Systems*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition (San Francisco: Berrett-Kehler Publishers, 2007), 179-94.

<sup>27</sup> Brown et al, “World Café,” 181-82.

<sup>28</sup> Mary Clark Moschella, *Ethnography as a Pastoral Practice* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2008), 151.





impossible. The largest potential for growth in rural areas is retention of newcomers. But, as stated previously, there is a critical two-year window for newcomers during which the local church, leading in practical ways, can show and create Welcoming and Belonging. During this critical two-year period in the newcomer's life, the newcomer is more likely to embrace a local helping agency. In the Bow Valley, the newcomer is almost three times more likely to engage with the church compared to local long-term residents (one in four newcomers compared to one in eleven long-term residents).<sup>36</sup> This creates a unique opportunity for the church to offer the local community a model of Welcoming and Belonging. The church has a major role to play in helping the community attain a goal of retention/integration as we continue to work with the BVIP and the TOB.

The two surveys we conducted demonstrated that BFGC is a Welcoming and Belonging place where people can and do connect inter-culturally. The church creates a safe place to accept differences and celebrate what we have in common. This safe place creates belonging. The surveys created the opportunity for people to speak up and voice their opinions, and there was a sense of agreement that the church is there for them and shows a genuine interest in them. In this way, the church models taking the initiative to understand others by being intentional in approaching others and finding means to better understand cultural differences and commonalities. A sense of being nurtured or cared for is the result. Yet we also saw that the survey instrument itself can bring fear of the unknown and transference of negative experiences from elsewhere. What surprised me was the church's desire to become more of an advocate in voicing what the newcomer may be afraid to voice. This revelation created a challenge for the church to become bold enough to address publicly what the newcomer is afraid to voice.

Those interviewed showed us that our identity is linked to our values and experience, and though our experiences may vary greatly, our innate values are very similar. Through our frustration in conducting the interviews, we discovered a missing component: a need for leadership to recruit, develop and empower more spiritual elders. These spiritual elders need to be seen by newcomers as being connected closely with the pastor.

*O-Plan Cebu* (Filipino flood relief) showed us how an event can be structured to allow for more grassroots participation in projects so the desired outcome of more involvement can be achieved. Events like *O-Plan Cebu* create opportunities for interactions with people of various backgrounds, make space for a sense of integration by allowing many voices to be heard, and invite others to join in and work together for the greater good. Thus, connections were created and barriers came down.

Linking immigration issues with the bible gave people the authority to speak about problems that are faced every day. Addressing these problems gave rise to many conversations and times of prayer as people discovered that their circumstances were not unique and they were not alone. The biblical narratives helped some people find words to describe their own emotions and shine a sacred light into dark, unknown, unexplored, and undefined areas of relationships. The sermons created opportunity to give voice to immigrant experiences and issues that some found hard to talk about. The sermons also helped to create common ground and vocabulary to explore together the meaning of voice, acceptance and purpose.

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<sup>36</sup>Megan Stewart, "Integration Assessment 2014," 61. (Belonging, Question 12). 98. (Welcoming, Question 3).

We saw from the various surveys, group discussions and feedback reviewed, that Welcoming and Belonging happens on different dimensions with varying results. The interviews gave us a glimpse of the areas in which a church can help families define themselves and bring purpose to their lives. The church offers optimism and a safe place to process different issues like discrimination and work-place misunderstandings. The church is a place where connections happen between people on a deeper level as support, acceptance, and purpose are offered. The church becomes a second family for many immigrant people.

The focus group created a safe place to explore dreams and work through realities. Our dreams need planning and people need encouragement to cause dreams to grow and become reality. The focus group was a catalyst for this activity as it intentionally encouraged people to consider their future. For me, as pastor, the focus group was also about conquering my fear of having people leave because they discovered that this community may not work for them and what they wanted in life was elsewhere. That fear was overcome by being true to the Lord, by focusing on the greater good, as well as seeing the excitement and development of people as they explored their dreams and realities. I learned to trust the Lord for the future of my life and the lives of those I truly care about. Though my fears were well founded and many people have left our community, many have also just arrived.

## Conclusions

God did not bring me to Canada to not make room for me.

- Michael Sarsoza, October 2009<sup>37</sup>

Immigration has been a big part of Canada's history and will continue to be a part of Canada's future. In this history, BFGC has been on an intentional journey to demonstrate the role a church can play through its ministry. This project examined BFGC's purpose of coming alongside to help the larger community create a stronger relationship between long-term residents and newcomers. By embracing a ministry of Welcoming and Belonging, an intentionally-focused church contributes to the larger community by creating social cohesion and integration between newcomers and the existing established community. We examined our own journey in voice, purpose and acceptance through the use of surveys, interviews and focus groups, and we discovered examples of Welcoming and Belonging in selected stories in the bible as well as in collected responses from recent immigrants and established residents of BFGC in the Bow Valley.

For those in the BFGC community, to be 'intercultural' is to declare what integration can look like and to be bold enough to model it for the Bow Valley community. The church, historically and currently, is a place that offers a sympathetic ear and a helping hand.

Welcoming is the ability to receive others according to how God receives us. There are different levels of welcoming that we offer each other. Belonging is a basic human need; we all want to belong to some degree and we all take risks as to the degree we want to belong.

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<sup>37</sup> Spoken at a Bible Study after two years as a TFW and it looked like he would have to return to the Philippines for good. His family was reunited in Banff as PRs on December 30, 2014. They became Canadian citizens August 2019 and voted October 21, 2019.

Welcoming and Belonging are held in tension by how much one is willing to Welcome and how much one is willing to Belong. In this tension is found the three distinct areas we measured: voice, acceptance and purpose. We may also call these three areas: political, social and economic. This is how Welcoming and Belonging work together and the church offers a safe place to explore our individual and corporate levels of Welcoming and Belonging.

The church also creates a safe place for people to develop a greater understanding of each other and the community in which they live by allowing sustained activities for social cohesion or integration to more naturally take place. As well, church is a safe place for intercultural relationships to begin to form and grow beyond the many activities we offer. These intercultural relationships are the by-product of having place in common. Given the opportunity, relationships form across many barriers be they cultural, linguistic or generational.

While this project may not be a perfect journey, it was an intentional journey that we hope will inspire others to embrace newcomers from multiple nationalities and to be embraced by them as they continue on their own journey. There is always room for others to Welcome and Belong as we continue to look for that city whose builder and maker is God (Heb 11:10).

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