

# Guidelines for Welcoming Immigrant Faith Communities

November 27, 2007

## Introduction

**Biblical Mandate** – Matthew 28: 19a “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations...” For over a century the church has sent out missionaries to “all the nations” . The reality of the new century is that “all the nations” are part of our everyday life. The neighborhoods of the greater Philadelphia metro area is no longer several generations of European immigrants but immigrants from all over the world. We don’t have to “go” far to meet up with “all the nations”.

We are blessed and challenged with the opportunity to learn from, minister to and with the growing racial/ethnic, cultural and international diversity in the Philadelphia metro area.

The following will guide the Presbytery as we work in partnership with immigrant and international groups seeking affiliations with the Presbytery of Philadelphia.

## The Role of the Presbytery

The Presbytery, through the Congregational Strategy Team, is open to creating new ways of doing ministry and new options for church development based on the specific needs of persons in immigrant and international communities wishing to be part of the Presbytery of Philadelphia.

The Presbytery will continue working to:

- Develop intentional strategies for supporting communities of faith in different cultural contexts.
- listen to the needs of the people and their circumstances
- support designs for ministry that will be an effective response to those needs
- identify and overcome the barriers within our Presbytery to ministry in different cultures

The Presbytery is flexible in considering and encouraging mutual exchange and support among the partners in ministry:

We will:

- Make adequate resources commitments including funding and support from Presbytery staff and volunteers.
- explore new criteria for measuring success
- make mutually agreed upon commitments based on realistic expectations
- will encourage established congregations to partner with immigrant or language specific faith communities and fellowships.

The Presbytery will support pastoral and lay leadership development appropriate to the needs of international and immigrant groups

- Develop new models of pastoral calls and recognition with flexibility in the area of compensation.
- Engage in pro-active preparation, recruitment, and continuing education training of leaders who demonstrate a commitment to Reformed faith.
- Affirm a sense of vocation and different styles of leadership for different contexts.

- Consider declaring worshipping communities and fellowships “validated ministries” and whenever possible recognize their pastors as minister members serving validated ministries.

The Presbytery will take into account and be sensitive to the cultural, social, and language differences of pastor and lay people in groups affiliated with the Presbytery. This is a time in the life of PCUSA to be creative, flexible, and willing to take risks in order to become a truly inclusive denomination by welcoming immigrant groups and others with special needs into the fellowship of the Presbyterian Church.

## GUIDELINES

In keeping with the great ends of the Church (6 -1.0200), the mandates to share the good news of God’s love (Matthew 9: 37 -38), to make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28....) and to respond to the call to a Missional church and presbytery, it is the policy of the Presbytery of Philadelphia to seek opportunities to reach out to immigrants and international people and encourage the development of new congregations. Under the current structure of the Presbytery, this responsibility is with the Congregational Strategy Team. The Committee on Ministry, with its oversight of pastors and established congregations, has a vested interest in the whole process.

It is understood that the number of church development projects the Presbytery can undertake is limited. Any application for financial aid by a recognized immigrant/international faith community will be considered sympathetically.

The Teams and staff of the Presbytery shall make themselves available to consult with Immigrant Faith Communities, to assist with problems which may occur, to advise on procedures and policy, and to encourage them in the process.

The Congregational Strategy Team shall remain current with and help groups take advantage of every possible source of funding (Presbytery, Synod, and General Assembly) available for use in support of approved projects. All parties should recognize that resources are limited.

Presbytery of Philadelphia provides the following process for Immigrant Faith Communities to become recognized as chartered congregations. The process is designed to give the group a chance to “try on” the PC (USA) before committing totally to it. It is also designed to provide a gradual immersion into the requirements and privileges of a fully organized church. The steps, outlined below, are as follows:

- Worshipping Community
- Immigrant Fellowship Group
- Immigrant Ministry Church
- Organized or Chartered Church

# PROCESS

## **Worshipping Community**

A worshipping Community is a group of individuals joining together for worship, Bible study, fellowship, support and evangelism willing to explore and pursue belief and practice of the Presbyterian Church (USA). They have come together because of language and/or cultural traditions. They do not necessarily have “pastoral leadership” in the traditional sense but have some leadership that is leading the group in worship and Bible Study.

Groups approaching the Presbytery with an interest in exploring what it means to become a formal Fellowship normally should first be recognized as a Worshipping Community and be encouraged and nurtured by both the staff/team and policies of the Presbytery at the request of the Congregational Strategy Team. The purpose of the step is to provide support and encouragement for the group and its leaders. They may or may not express a desire to move toward status as a congregation, but they will be nurtured by the Presbytery and enjoy the fellowship of the body of Christ as expressed through the Presbytery of Philadelphia. The Congregational Strategy Team will give the group guidance on how to prepare to be recognized as a Fellowship Community.

### Characteristic/criteria for a Worshipping Community

- Such groups can be self forming, initiated by the Presbytery or sponsored by another Presbyterian congregation and will be accepted through a vote of the Presbytery and recognized as a “worshipping community”.
- The Congregational Strategy Team will work with this Community on what it means to be part of the PC (USA) and enter into dialogue about the interest of the group to move forward into the next phase.
- After initial recognition by Presbytery, a Worshipping Community will submit an annual report and letter of request each year to Congregational Strategy Team for continuation of its recognized status.

## **Immigrant Fellowship Community**

A Fellowship is a community of believers with regular worship, that has an identifiable and recognized leader, in process of developing a mission plan that includes leadership training, goals for growth and evangelism, opportunities for Christian Education for everyone, and financially viable budget. They may at this time have a contract or covenant with a particular person (clergy or lay) to be the spiritual and worship leader of the group. A fellowship group may not have the ability to contract or covenant with a “full time” leader.

An immigrant faith community that desires to become a recognized Fellowship Community of the Presbyterian Church (USA) shall follow the procedures outlined below.

- the group approaches the Presbytery through the Congregational Strategy Team and requests status as a “fellowship.” and can **meet most** of the following criteria:
  - has a regular worship schedule and a regular place of worship

- a theology that is compatible with the Reformed Tradition
- Indicates the leader and congregation intend to join the Presbyterian Church (USA)
- Shows an understanding of Presbyterian polity and belief, that the Book of Order and the Book of Confessions will be followed and indicates the group's full cooperation with the supervision of the Presbytery.
- Demonstrates, possibly through a budget and budget projections, the group's ability to pay its pastoral leadership according to Presbytery guidelines. Sensitivity should be shown to International/Immigrant Faith communities which might experience conflict if a pastor receives a full professional salary
- Subject always to the review of the Presbytery, through the Congregational Strategy Team, the Fellowship may elect its own officers, adopt its own by-laws, and be self determined in its actions.
- All records shall be submitted annually to the presbytery through the Congregational Strategy Team for review and inclusion in the records of the Presbytery.
- The Fellowship shall keep minutes of its meetings, records of members, baptisms, funerals, weddings, and communion, and accounts of all monies received and disbursed.
- The group will be encouraged to contribute to Presbyterian general mission even though it will not be required to pay per capita as an Immigrant Fellowship Community.
- If the Immigrant Faith Community does not already have a pastor, or commissioned lay pastor, one of its first responsibilities is to find one and form a covenant with them through a contract or a call. The Committee on Ministry (COM) shall assist the Fellowship Community in a process of finding appropriate pastoral leadership. The COM is encouraged to take particular note of G. 11.0404f in the reception of immigrant pastor.
- The Presbytery shall recognize formally both the role of ordained or lay leader and the existence and ministry of the fellowship.
- The Fellowship group will be encouraged to participate in presbytery meetings. The group will send one lay representative to presbytery meetings where they will be given voice but no vote.

## **Immigrant Ministry Church**

Immigrant Ministry Church is a group of immigrant believers that has pastoral leadership in accordance with G14.0513f. There is a core group of committed lay leaders, a Christian Education program for all ages; a five year proposed budget that realistically moves toward being self-sustaining and giving 10% to the denomination's mission program.

Immigrant Fellowship becomes an Immigrant Ministry Church when it:

- Applies to Presbytery, through the Congregational Strategy Team, for such status.
- Has agreed with the Congregational Strategy Team on membership goals judged to be sufficient to maintain a viable, year-round program of worship and service.
- Is or has demonstrated the ability to become financially self-supporting in keeping with its stated goals and time-line.
- The Immigrant Ministry Church will participate in the Presbytery meetings with an elected lay leader in accordance of G. 9.0503

- Though not required the Immigrant Ministry Church will be encouraged to participate paying their portion of the Presbytery Per Capita.
- The Immigrant Ministry Church and the Congregational Strategy Team will develop an evaluation process which will determine the status of the congregation.
- The Immigrant Ministry Church will be able to apply for Mission Funding grant through the General Assembly, Synod and Presbytery.

## **CHARTERED CHURCH**

This phase shall be in accordance of Book of Order G- 7.0100 – G-7.0404

### **Addendums (updated on October 11, 2007)**

- A: We are Called to Build Community Among Strangers
- B. Bibliography: Radical Hospitality: Partnership with New Immigrant Ministries
- C: Models for Immigrant Faith Communities
- D: The Role of the Liason

## **Addendum A**

### **We are Called to Build Community Among Strangers**

You shall not oppress a resident alien (stranger); you know the heart of an alien (stranger), for you were aliens (strangers) in the land of Egypt. *Exodus 23:9*

So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to you who were near; for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of household of God. *Ephesians 2:17-19*

Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing so some have entertained angels without knowing it. *Hebrews 13:2*

The Hebrew word for “resident alien” means a stranger and sojourner; an outsider who comes into the midst of the community without the network of relationships that can be counted upon to insure care, protection, acceptance. It refers to one who belongs to another group but now resides in the midst of the Israelite community. Hospitality to strangers was expressed by sharing a meal, a simple, ordinary act that provides for human needs, builds friendships, and makes people feel included, “at home” in the community. This is not a simple act of charity, but a habit permeating the whole social structure of the community: family life, economic life, the justice system, and the worship activities of the people.

#### **A prayer for building community among strangers:**

God of all communities and all strangers, your story tells us that out of clay and breath, you created all human beings. Your story tells us that you are like a welcoming father and a nurturing mother, longing for your children to come home and be under your protective wing.

Your story tells us that you chose to be so close to us, that you came to us – Emmanuel – calling strangers together to live out “good news.” Your story tells us that this good news was “strange” for some and therefore threatening.

Your story tells us that, in his ministry, Jesus the Christ broke barriers of estrangement between race, class, gender, and religion in order to build communities of grace and love, and, in doing so, Jesus brought people uniquely to you. Your story tells us that your Spirit, your breath broke barriers of strangeness between those who spoke different languages and were from different cultures, and your Spirit empowered a new community called “church” – the body of Christ.

Now, in our day – full of strangers and communities – may this church hear your voice, a voice who calls us to build community among all people, so that, through the grace and love of Jesus Christ, and the empowerment of your Holy Spirit, we may become your hope – clay and breath, children of the living God. As always, we ask in the name of Jesus, Amen.

*From National Capital Presbytery Guidelines for Receiving Immigrant Faith Communities*

**Addendum B**  
**BIBLIOGRAPHY**

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## Addendum C

### Models for Immigrant Ministry Faith Communities

#### **“Host Model” or “Nesting model”**

People who share a common language and culture gather ( with or without a pastor) for worship, Bible Study and fellowship. An existing Presbytery of Philadelphia Congregations provides a place for the group to worship and meet (with or without rent) while the immigrant congregation grows to a size where it can support its own home. The host congregation may invite the immigrant congregation to participate in Sunday School, fellowship events, special worship services, youth and other programs. Members of the immigrant congregation may or may not become baptized members of the host congregation.

#### **“Staff Evangelist” Model**

A Presbytery of Philadelphia intentionally hires staff to do outreach within a targeted immigrant group that will result in one congregation with two different languages and cultures living together side by side.

#### **“Merger” Model or “Bilingual-Bicultural” model**

An immigrant group approaches an existing Presbytery of Philadelphia congregation for the purpose of merging their ministries. Initially, the relationship begins as one congregation with two different languages and cultures living together side by side. when the two groups have enough in common, a plan is developed for merging leadership, staff, memberships and programs.

#### **“Mission Extension” Model**

The three models above have the potential to result in a multi-racial, multi-cultural congregation. The “mission extension” model is an existing congregation that extends its mission to include a population of people not ordinarily a part of that church. The worship service for the immigrant group is considered one of the worship options for the church. Or, the congregation has one worship service that blends the worship styles of the two groups. As the immigrant group grows, they are invited to join the members of the existing congregation. Immigrant members are elected to the church boards, serve on committees and share in the decision making for aspects of church life.

#### **“Multicultural” Model**

A multicultural church is one congregation made up of people with many different heritages, customs and languages. There is no effort to assimilate members into one ethnic or stereotypical church. Instead, they celebrate their variety and find ways to use the many gifts offered by the people. The leadership of the church, through its staff, boards and committees, includes persons who represent the cultural and racial diversity. Worship, music, the arts, spiritual practices and

theological perspectives and expressions – all reflect the many different aspects of the multicultural congregation, and their life together is enhanced by them.

### **A Model for Immigrant Ministry**

by Robert E. Larson, Jr.

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The session of a congregation that hosts an immigrant community might consider the possibility of “sponsoring” the development of that community into a recognized congregation. Rather than simply providing space for the immigrant community to meet (sometimes called “hosting”) consider allowing that community to “nest” in your congregation and adopting it as an outreach mission of the church. What this sponsorship might mean in terms of mission support, oversight, use of the facilities, and program integration will depend upon the needs of the immigrant community and the resources of the congregation.

Here are steps that might be taken in this sponsoring arrangement:

1. Session votes to make such hosting a mission of the congregation.
2. Someone from the immigrant community (presumably a bi-lingual person and probably the worship leader) is invited to join the membership of the congregation and is then appointed as liaison between the session/mission committee and the immigrant community.
3. That person can be elected an elder of the congregation and then serve on the session to represent the interests of the immigrant community.
4. In fact, all of the “members” of the immigrant community can be invited to join the membership of the sponsoring congregation.
5. The session or mission committee of the church and the leadership of the immigrant community work to promote friendship, understanding, mutual trust, and a sense of common mission among everyone involved.
6. If the worship leader of the immigrant community is an ordained minister in another denomination, he or she should be encouraged to transfer his or her membership to the Presbytery of Philadelphia; if this person is not ordained but otherwise eligible he or she can be encouraged to become a candidate for ordination in the PC(USA).
7. The above arrangements can stay in place as long as appropriate or necessary, but if the immigrant community grows and develops sufficiently, it can then seek to be recognized by the Presbytery as a Immigrant Ministry Church.

**Addendum D**  
**Role of the Liaison to an Immigrant Congregation**

**Presbytery of Philadelphia**  
**Congregational Strategy Team**

Attend Periodic Congregational Strategy Team meetings for (immigrant / NCD)

- Training
- Reporting
- Group problem solving
- Planning
- To give and receive team support

Meet regularly with your immigrant pastor, session or congregation to:

Maintain a supportive relationship

- Understand how their practices are different from the PC(USA)
- Listen to concerns of the congregation
- Attend worship occasionally
- Check in with the pastor by phone
- Offer appropriate resources when possible
- Pray for them

Be the congregation's resource person and connection to Presbytery of Philadelphia

- Participate in annual review and progress reports
- Interpret and advise on Presbytery of Philadelphia guidelines and Book of Order questions
- Assist them in applying for funding and grants
- Guide them through the steps to become an organized church
- Teach how to fill out forms, tax exempt applications, prepare a budget, negotiate contracts, etc.
- Help them think about their long-range vision and growth
- Assist them in learning Presbytery polity and record keeping