A Heart for the World Next Door: How you and your church can flourish by serving immigrant neighbors

Zach Szmara
Pastor, The Bridge Community Church
National Director, Immigrant Connection
Global Migration: from everywhere to everywhere
Foreign-born residents made up 13.7 percent of the U.S. population in 2017. That put the proportion of immigrants in the United States last year at the highest since 1910, when they made up 14.7 percent of the population. Current Foreign-Born Population in the US: over 45 million
Your community is changing.
Biblical Perspective

- Quartet of the vulnerable – widow, orphan, poor, foreigner living among you
- Matthew 25
- Philoxenos
- Kollao
Logansport, Indiana
99% White in 1990 to over 33% Hispanic and Asian immigrant families in 2019
People who stay strictly within their own cultures can go on indefinitely without ever having to confront their own ethnocentric and enculturated selves.

Personal growth – learning more about myself.

Immigrant friendships open up entire networks that may be shut off without them.

Stronger relationships with immigrant friends as they are already deeply rooted in stress and pressure of unfamiliar, uncomfortable territory.

Exposed me to fascinating differences and surprising likenesses.
Helpful reflections

- Comfort level should be a gauge of reality of authenticity of relationship
  - Multi-colored (assimilation) versus multi-cultural
- Understanding the difference between base, bridge, and border
- Not right or wrong but different
- Communication / language / unspoken expectations
- "Crossing thresholds"
- "Voice for the voiceless" versus "we have a voice and you’re not listening" – listen and learn
- Equality versus equity
Action items

- Become aware
- Become educated
  - Preach and teach – educate others
- Diversify your own experience
  - Assessing the last 5: last 5 books you’ve read, last 5 movies you’ve watched, last 5 albums you’ve listened to, last 5 people you’ve invited over for dinner, last 5...
- Learn someone else’s story
- Amplify immigrant voices
- Place yourself under the leadership of “the other”
- In every context ask where am I located
  - Privilege and power differentials
  - individual/explicit vs group/implicit
- Become a change agent in your sphere of influence
  - Commit to hope, grace, reconciliation
- Commit to strong, persistent, and determined action
  - Be known by Biblical hospitality
- “You’re very welcome”