

# Challenges Facing Immigrant Pastors & Congregations Meeting In English Speaking Churches

Article by [Various Contributors](#) added October 25th, 2011 [1 Comment](#) [Printer-Friendly](#)

The growing immigrant community in America is a literal cross-cultural mission field at our doorstep. Over the years efforts made to reach these precious souls with the Gospel by an existing English-speaking congregation has proven difficult it not disastrous. Below are the observations of two men regarding the challenges facing immigrant churches and pastors when meeting in English speaking churches.



As a Chinese/Indonesian American elder at a mainstream evangelical church, my comments were derived from Indonesian pastors whose churches rent facilities from English-speaking churches, with one exception. This immigrant pastor was on the staff of an established English-speaking church.

In dealing with their “landlord” churches, immigrant “renter” pastors encountered the following issues:

1. ***Rigidity due to the legal requirements, adherence to rules and regulations of Western culture.***  
Cultural aspects within immigrant churches play a significant role in their expressions of faith and worship. As renters, immigrant congregations had to navigate legalities imposed by established religious institutions. Lease terms and conditions often bound the renter with rigid legal requirements including rules, liability insurance, and/or a correct understanding of subtle nuances.
2. ***Mistrust due to poor communication.*** Language barriers, differing viewpoints and philosophies, space and trust exemplify basic differences in communication styles that led to miscommunication and misunderstandings. Although a personal relationship between “renter” and “landlord” could have alleviated many problems, such interaction requires time and patience. Renting churches often view this relationship as unnecessary or time consuming.
3. ***Prejudice due to differences.*** Some major immigrant churches with strong finances avoid dealing with English-speaking churches. To minimize problems, they build their own facilities. However, many small congregations without financial resources must rent making the worship schedule, potential rent increases, and maintenance responsibilities an ongoing concern. At times prejudice by a “landlord” created the misperception that immigrant pastors wanted financial support when joining the “landlord’s” denomination.
4. ***Lack of integration due to poor oversight.*** More than two decades ago, immigrant church members in one established English-speaking congregation started an Indonesian fellowship ministry, which quickly turned into a worship service. Intentional integration into the larger body resulted in a growing immigrant membership. However, without effective senior pastor supervision, the

immigrant pastor created a “church within church.” Painful separation and the pastor’s dismissal became inevitable. Almost 100 immigrant congregants left the church.

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Through the years of working with Latino immigrants in the United States I have found three common misleading factors that challenge the relationship among immigrant based congregations using the facilities of English speaking churches.

1. *False Expectations*. Many churches establish their ministries for immigrants with the idea of seeing immediate results. The reality is that winning the confidence of an immigrant community can take a considerable amount of time and resources, something that not everyone within the host church is ready or willing to face.

Constancy and perseverance is indispensable when working with immigrants. Having a genuine and lasting intentional commitment can become the greatest challenge if there are false expectations. To see a church starting a ministry to immigrants with great enthusiasm is not unusual, but to see it endure the test of time with the same motivation is rare.

2. *Stereotyping* is a major conflict that silently moves through the relations between churches that share facilities. These generalized perspectives can determine and limit the time schedule given to an immigrant congregation, the resources provided and possible integration in the common good towards the neighborhood that surrounds the facility.

Assumptions should always be avoided and conclusions must not be drawn too quickly regardless of the cultural differences and predispositions created by social bias. The challenge is to overcome the mutual necessity of learning the customs, lifestyles and even the language of the people with whom the congregations will share a building.

3. *Sustainability* brings one of the most difficult burdens. The capacity and power of financial resources from an immigrant congregation can be restricted in comparison with an English speaking church. This is why it is critical for the facilitating church to determine and to understand the financial limitations of the hosted

church. Mature and developed immigrant churches can overcome the financial struggles, but this is not always the case for most of the congregations that rely on other church's facilities and resources.

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