

# Welcoming Newcomers

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A friend and I were talking about all the new Asian immigrants that have recently moved into our small town: Koreans coming as motel keepers, Filipinos coming as care-givers for our seniors, another group who took on a fast-food franchise. My friend called it “the browning of our streets”.

Within a relatively short time our long-standing traditional population has been augmented. But I wonder what happens now? Will we remain little ethnic ghettos, solitudes that don't have too much to do with each other except in a service capacity?

For a hundred years past there has been a very slow blending: occasional bouts of cultural exchange with the Natives from near-by, attempts at the working together of religious denominations. Nothing great, but we keep trying.

Now this change is so abrupt, backed up by a world-wide web of technology.

Misunderstandings, suspicions and conflict could take root unless early attempts are made to reach across those cultural, ethnic and religious barriers. But who makes the first step?

If we want to make ours a sustaining community, we have the power and responsibility to constantly work toward more positive ends.

Churches can have a big role – organizing international suppers, making occasion for groups and individuals to talk together and tell their stories, making opportunities for new comers to learn the unique gifts rural communities and the rural culture has to offer.

I once saw a TV program where the leaders from a synagogue and a Baptist Congregation, who lived near each other in an American west-coast city, were having active exchanges with each other.

Not that everyone think the same, but we need to try to cross barriers and build understanding. Communities that respond in this way, with their adults and their children, could lay a solid foundation that could lead to a vital future.

*(by Joyce Sasse)*