

Central Vancouver (February 3, 2016)
Fairview, Mount Pleasant, Shaughnessy, South Cambie, Riley Park

20 people from 14 out of 65 congregations/organizations (22% representation)

WHAT IS GOD DOING?

Mentally survey your neighbourhood, select what you sense is the single most hopeful sign of God's activity, and write down as much detail about that sign of hope as you can. The sign of hope may be something God is doing through your congregation or ministry, or through someone else's. The sign may even be something God is doing through a secular organization, local business or group of neighbours (God often works ahead of his people and outside the institutional church); and you think the Christian community should join in or do likewise.

- The most hopeful sign of God's activity is that there are so many Christian communities in our neighbourhood who have not left for easier terrain but who have dug in or moved in to partner with Christ for city transformation. This Vancouver Consultation: Looking to see what God is doing, seeking to connect our churches in meaningful ways. Church communities looking to address real life concerns: housing, affordable/healthy food (community gardens, etc.), refugee crisis, immigrant integration.
- Church plants in the area over the last years: Alliance, Reality Vancouver, Salvation Army, Missouri Synod Lutheran, Filipino Church on Fraser. Since 1999 we have brought the good news message through our thrift shop, which is one of the longest running thrift shops in the city. The gatherings of people committed to serving God. The development of church closer knit to each other and to God (King's Way Church) and committed to prayer.
- Our church (The King's Way) operates a thrift shop as a way to serve the local community and engage people in discussions about faith. We received a new vision for what that could look like, since the shop had become outdated and cluttered. Our people have embraced a makeover of the shop and look forward to how this will enable them to meet new people on our street. The real miracle was the transformation of our congregation, because change is difficult for them. Many of the people in our congregation are struggling financially and mentally. The Holy Spirit has been doing much to transform the thoughts and actions to mark these struggles. The beauty of what He has done is in the way He prepared them to embrace change.
- Belonging without believing, curious about God and faith, concern for injustice. A combination of curiosity and a desire to have community has drawn people to the church. They are ok with belonging even if they are not believers. I am hopeful because there has often been a divide (an "either you're in or you're out" mentality) and I see this divide diminishing. I believe it reflects the heart of God who has always wanted to bring salvation to all people. I suspect the Jew/Gentile divide that existed in Jesus's day broke God's heart. The 'closed doors' of our modern church breaks his heart as well. As people feel comfortable coming into the doors of the church, the walls of hostility are broken down and the 'good news' is brought out into the open. It doesn't mean we aren't to be missional. It's just a sign of hope I've rarely seen (in the past it's just been those wanting benevolent monies who venture inside).
- The English Ministry of Chown Memorial & Chinese United Church has 35-40 people attending regularly. [I'm newly] hired full time to transition it to a neighbourhood church called Cambie Village Church. Ministry to the community. Church has a place. Listening for the Holy Spirit's leading. The church prayed and sought God's leading about closing or downsizing, hiring part time. Instead, the people felt that God was leading them to trust his plans for the

future, and to invest in that future church by seeking a full time minister and believing God was at work – in mission – for the neighbourhood. This stands as a sign of God’s grace, of trust in His goodness & plans for the future. The risk of losing cultural identity, trusting God’s plan to reach ALL people for Christ’s sake.

- Churches are re-thinking how they physically show up, i.e., as a congregation, as a building/facility, as neighbours. In particular, I am moved most recently by decisions some churches are making in light of the Cambie Corridor redesign / planning initiative: Oakridge Lutheran Church considering how to leverage their real estate asset to address a social need (rental housing) while at the same time re-posturing and positioning themselves in the neighbourhood. I’ve been impressed by my own congregation (Oakridge Adventist) to think through some of the same things. This re-positioning and re-posturing speaks to a desire to be a faithful presence rather than simply a privileged presence.
- People showing up to connect in communities, giving generously when they know how to give. Connecting across socio-economic boundaries. Creating a sense of place that is beautiful (green, public art, creative) allows people to serve and fosters connections. Increases resilience and decreases vulnerability. Collaborativeness not competitiveness.
- New church plants/re-launches in the area (Riley Park, Little Mountain) that are engaging with the community and living out the gospel with authenticity. Tenth East Van, Reality Vancouver, Mountainview Baptist, Christ City. All are new to the area since we launched in 2007 and all are engaged with Inner Hope Youth Ministries.
- Sponsoring refugees: [this is] how we love our neighbour. Fundraising: \$50,000 of which 25k was from outside sources and individuals not part of our worshipping community (Kitsilano Community Church). Volunteers have given over 100 hours a week, donated a suite, and furniture has come through Homestart Foundation. Why this response? Perhaps we see ourselves as blessed and so ask how can we help? There is a feeling of helplessness on the world stage, yet here is a chance for concrete response – a hope that this action changes the world, impacts Syria. The family we sponsored was passed over by many because they have permanent health challenges, but we wanted to bring our resources and Vancouver’s health resources to this family in especially difficult circumstances.
- Cooperation between Holy Trinity Anglican and Pacific Theatre and South Granville Seniors Centre. Our building project generates the possibility of co-operation between Holy Trinity and community stakeholders. The City is agreeing to include Holy Trinity on street maps free of charge. Connections with shops in the neighbourhood that are will to donate goods to church events. Three adult baptisms. This cooperation and the baptisms are beginning to draw people into the church life.
- Subsidised housing for the elderly and disabled; church-based & government-supported; safe and secure; promotes both independence and inter-dependence. Ministry of Word & Sacrament: for the sake of faith, growth of community, base for works of love, promotes personal courage and confidence, mission base for evangelism
- More interest from churches in our [Journey Canada] ministry. More programs becoming available. I assume, I hope, more pastors being comfortable with expressing vulnerability.
- For me, the single most helpful sign comes to me in the story of one person whose experience represents others. A respected physician in our city who had exposure to a Catholic Church as a young boy, but since then didn’t have any connection to a Christian or religious community, was invited to our faith community by a friend who is part of our church. After a few months of attending services and getting involved in our community, he wrote to me and said that at the Sunday service he felt something he had never felt before. He said “I think the Holy Spirit came inside me”. He was then baptized and is an active member of our church. This is a sign of God’s power to spiritually awaken a person to Christ.
- Our congregation [Basel Hakka Lutheran] reframed the idea of how their faith applies to all of life. Seeing the fruit of the Gospel in the lives of the people: generosity, hospitality. People are taking seriously the question of what it means to be the church, to be committed to it.

- The refugee center being constructed at Victoria & 10th – love and care for those in need. Vancouver is a place of hope for the hopeless.
- Movement in our congregation [Tenth Church East Van] and others toward a parish model and missional community living – groups of God’s people who are doing life together in community as their primary method of discipleship – neighbourhood groups, justice issues facing a group of people such as refugee support (bless and invest in the nations), First Nations, ending local/global exploitation [sex trafficking] through awareness and activism
- SA Foundation [local and international rehabilitation and community development for women who have been trafficked]
- Inner Hope Youth Ministries
- Community kitchens and Neighbourhood Houses ; missio dei and care for the world

WHAT ARE THE SPIRITUAL AND SOCIAL CHALLENGES?

Participants were asked to answer either 1a or 1b and then either 2a or 2b.

1a. What are the main spiritual challenges confronting your neighbourhood? Are these the same as or different from the ones confronting your parishioners or ministry participants?

- Our community, Olympic Village, is not well defined yet, it is less than 5 years old.
- Selfishness which leads to isolation of others and from others (vs. courage, generosity, wisdom) -- materialism, consumerism, individualism; Pride, Greed, Foolishness – what does it mean to be truly human -> *imago dei*
- Disintegration/fragmentation – no integration of generations, of race or culture; little integration of faith and work, [low comprehension of] why God is interested in our cultivation. The root cause of this disintegration is fear of difference and inability to relate to those who are “other,” to see their value & worth. Apathy – selfishness & individualism – lack of understanding of what it means to be human, God’s image.
- In our church: connecting faith with work, connecting knowledge with the heart. Discipleship.
- Idolatry of affluence, seeking “the good life” and looking good. Spiritual apathy and surface-level engagement in all aspects of life. This is the product of working-living-hobbies in different parts of the city, with no sense of belonging and investing in one place.
- The spiritual stigma and taboo that surrounds mental illness, preventing us from loving and being loved. Families and individuals affected by mental illness tell stories of faith communities disconnecting from them. Caused by theological perspectives, misunderstanding mental illness, and fear.
- Indifference, apathy toward God and other people, I see this in the broader neighbourhood. Maybe goes with isolation. Meanwhile in my congregation, I note signs of discouragement.
- Lack of need for dependency on God: material wealth, community. This is different from the Inner Hope community members (who are Indigenous), who struggle with a lack of hope, economic difficulties, and addictions.
- For spiritual health we must be aware (and living out that awareness) that we are part of something larger than ourselves – something good, something that will uphold us. But living in Vancouver, we are isolated, exhausted from trying to look as good as others.
- Wealth, comfortableness, distractions from spiritual matters - too many opportunities/options. Consumerism, defensiveness, emphasis on privacy and individualism. Church members experience much the same!

1b. St Paul says “ our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against ... the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places” (Eph 6:12). What spiritual forces especially mark your neighbourhood? Which ones threaten your people? If this language is foreign to you, replace “spiritual forces” with “idols.”

- The main way that the enemy has brought darkness into our neighbourhood is by convincing us to think about ourselves first and to make decisions that drive us to isolate ourselves from others. He keeps us working for our own needs and tempts us to always want a little bit more so that we have no time or money to think of someone else's needs.
- Materialism, unhealthy capitalism, slavery, people who love darkness more than light
- Heaven needs to battle heaven, prayer against spiritual realms. Lack of spiritual interest is a symptom in the neighbourhood. Pray that God would open the eyes of the people.
- Classism and judgement: quiet and subtle, but the degree to which Vancouver becomes more elite is accepted. This apathy is a gross misapprehension of what makes a healthy city. It is a city for the wealthy elite.
- The spiritual forces of darkness have blinded people of their need for Jesus. People in our affluent neighbourhood are typically self-sufficient. They feel they have all they need, but that "all" doesn't include God.

2a. What is the most damaging social injustice impacting your neighbourhood? What are its main effects? In what ways, if any, does it affect people in your church or ministry?

- We live in a fairly affluent neighbourhood. However, of course, there are very poor people – including the homeless – who walk through our back alley collecting bottles and cans. In some cases, these people break into garages and homes. Not sure of all the causes of the poverty, but surely one main cause would be childhood trauma and abuse.
- Income inequality. Some have so much & live comfortably, with all the power that comes with money. Others have nothing & are not trusted, respected, noticed or taken seriously, or allowed to use their gifts.
- South Granville is generally a "high end" neighbourhood. It attracts people from elsewhere for shopping and entertainment. But high end retail has forced out local shops, so now it lacks everyday services for locals, e.g., no supermarket. Some of my parishioners live in the area and are affected.
- Loneliness - There is a separation and disconnect that happens in our neighbourhood and church community. People who come here from other places talk about inviting people into their homes and then never receiving a reciprocal invitation, and they become discouraged. Sometimes it is a spirit of not wanting to encroach on others, so people are left alone ... and it is not good for humankind to be alone.
- Displacement from our community built over years because of cost of living and gentrification: old age and income inequality together yield isolation, forced transition, and loneliness because of no community; gruelling commute, food security issues and high rent, "wealthy" people teetering on bankruptcy as well.
- Relocation – tearing down of the BC Housing complex at Little Mountain: lack of pre-planning, empty for almost a decade (only one building replaced to date). Utilizing money gained through sale to build social housing elsewhere around province. Pushed a large % of the neighbourhood poor out. Many families in our circle were displaced.
- Isolation – affecting our congregation too.
- Lack of affordable housing, especially for the vulnerable. Gentrification as well. It definitely affects our people.

2b. What is your neighbourhood's greatest wound? Similarly, thinking about your parishioners or ministry participants, what is their greatest wound as a group?

- A key church in our fellowship of churches split in the 70's over a desire by some to relocate to Surrey. Those who stayed struggled to remain relevant to the cultural changes that happened after the people with money left. The church has been on life support for the past 10 years.

- I'm not sure how to say this, and fear that saying it will be inflammatory – and perhaps that is the greatest wound in and of itself. But there is a great wound in confusion around gender identity. I also feel isolation is a major wound.
- Loss of identity as a neighbourhood in the Cambie Corridor: transition, new buildings, new money, bright future for business. Expensive housing prices, people move out.
- Affordability of housing in Mount Pleasant – our area is now one of the hippest in Vancouver. Cafes, boutiques, shops ... “lifestyle” is the key word. People are moving into neighbourhood in search of trendy lifestyle. At the same time, there are plenty of homeless or mentally ill people being pushed out. People are quite apathetic to these people in general. People are more concerned about quality of life than seeing the brokenness in their neighbourhood. So apathy is the spiritual challenge.
- People in our church are very wary of homeless people coming into our church. Some have broken in and caused damage, frightened female church members, asked for money by telling lies and making empty promises. The church wants to keep doors open and be welcoming but these hurts have kept the church on high alert with increased security measures. There needs to be more trust, the church should be a sanctuary to those in need, but protection and safety measures must also be put in place for parishioners to feel safe.