

## **Strathcona & The Downtown Eastside (February 10, 2016)**

29 people from 21 of 44 congregations/organizations (48% 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.**

- People coming to the neighbourhood & sharing what they have in the DTES, e.g., a wedding in another part of the city shared their food. Taking time for people and to smile at people. Talking about Jesus in your own life and how he has transformed me from being homeless to being a lover of Jesus and lover of people and lover of the neighbourhood where I live.
- Servant Partners develops recent graduates through a 20 month internship. The internship accomplishes a lot of things, but the place I see Jesus moving the most is within the interns' relationships with their neighbours in social housing. We are finding a lot of openness to Jesus among a very ethnically diverse community. We see Jesus moving among Cantonese, Mandarin, and Spanish speakers. We have relationships with numerous Muslim women from the neighbourhood. We find it complicated to create places for more cultures to connect but we see Jesus bringing them together. We host daily prayer for the city from 9:15-10am at 667 Prior St.
- I see and hear the Lord's amazing love & transformation coming from the missions down here in the DTES. Many are coming to the Lord, going to Bible schools and through detox & recovery. The Bible school teams coming from Abbotsford & Alberta tell wonderful stories of their encounters down here. I received three visions from the Lord since 2000 of a huge coming revival. We have been praying since then; sometimes there are only two praying, but suddenly the numbers are growing and people are coming right off the street! Last night a man who had been drunk for 30 years but was now sober for ten days dropped in to pray with us.
- Lives are visibly changing. Less drug and substance abuse. Hunger for truth (the word of God) is evident in those who come into our ministry. They have changed and have assimilated into society. Some have gone to Bible colleges. We have been praying for the last 19 years for great revival to happen, because I believe this [praying] is one step/sign of the revival that God is bringing. Every Friday from 9am – 12pm, we at Potters Place Mission pray for God to transform our city and fill the churches with new vision and the Holy Spirit.
- Social Housing – neighbours caring for neighbours. Friends at Maclean Park just had a baby. Historically, they've avoided neighbours, after a bad experience with neighbour contacting Child Services on them. Through community potlucks with Servant Partners, they've created a unique cross-cultural bond with a neighbour in their housing complex. After baby was born, this neighbour was invited to be the godmother.
- Chinatown – increased attention to displacement of Chinatown Seniors. These seniors are powerless, isolated and voiceless largely due to language. Thanks to groups like Chinatown Action and devoted Mandarin/Cantonese speakers, they are encouraged to pick up power. Some of our friends participate in ESL groups to build community with one another in a building (Roddan Lodge) that is up for re-development (causing instability and fear) and to win

allies among English speakers. Points to the transforming work of God through the community working cross-culturally.

- Different churches working together at Strathcona Church in unity. It is rare to see multiple denominations and streams come together under one roof and minister to the same neighbourhood.
- Big sign – in spite of poverty in the neighbourhood or no-belief in wealthier areas [of the neighbourhood], churches are still gathering, people giving, ministries growing. Small signs – people in food lines getting food for others who cannot come because of health reasons; I am asked to get priests to bless SRO rooms or I hear that some Sisters were invited to visit. This site of meeting today (Strathcona Church) was the Catholic Parish of St. Francis Xavier until 1996. Now being used by God in ways for his good.
- The pastors of several DTES ministries are meeting monthly to pray, commiserate and plan out 4 annual gatherings of their congregations together. As we have been talking, a big concern has been how to create and maintain faith communities that include wealthy and poor; addicts, those in recovery, and those who have more socially acceptable addictions; young & old; hipster and homeless. Thinking & talking about this and including those disparate groups in genuine fellowship and life together is a sure sign of God's Kingdom. In our context, we are seeing many people in recovery coming to faith and joining our worshiping community. Our worship gatherings, small groups and community houses are filled with people from widely differing backgrounds.
- People being born again through the preaching of the gospel. Believers being discipled and put to work in serving the Gospel. Jesus said, "Follow me..." The Great Commission. As you look for and find opportunities to share the Gospel, rely on the Holy Spirit to guide you in His word and in opportunities to minister. Try not to rely on "systems" but the simple message of the Gospel.
- There has been a tendency to look at the DTES as a place that is challenged by social problems because it is spiritually deficient. The neighbourhood receives thousands of people a year "on mission", often with an effort to evangelize. The reality is that this neighbourhood has more people who are open to talking about their faith than other areas in Vancouver. The sign of God's Kingdom is not because of churches or organizations but because of the sheer number of people that I know who are believers. One event is the funeral of Rosalyn H. She was a woman with a long-term addiction to heroin, in & out of prostitution, and connected with many ministries in Vancouver. Not only had they ministered to her, but her life ministered to so many who were present as well, and demonstrated the breadth of the Kingdom work in Vancouver.
- Feeding organizations that are loving the DTES – The Door Is Open, Tenth Church, Harbour Light, UGM. Unity in the Body of Christ – bridges between denominations, and between the Roman Catholic Archdiocese and Evangelicals.
- God is very alive at The Door Is Open through every one of us serving and through those whom he sent us to serve. The smile we share could radiate God's love, a visible sign of mercy. Their openness to share even sad events of life that brought them to where they are at now, and to share that God is very much present in their life. We could see hope in them. They taught me there is so much hope.
- God is at work on Cordova Street. People in great need are serving each other. There is a great respect and sense of dignity present there.
- One of our ladies who comes from a very broken background of addiction, sexual abuse and involvement in drugs and prostitution came to know Jesus about 4 years ago. She has been telling all her friends, family and neighbours that Christ can transform their lives too. She lives in the DTES and is beginning a Bible Study in her building where there are 149 units of people who come from similar backgrounds. Many know what she was like and have seen the transformation!
- Mission Possible's MP Enterprises is for people who want to become self sufficient. They arrive at MP broken spiritually and leave with a new relationship with Jesus Christ. Amazing

transformation. God's at work among the weak/lost and addicted. Trust starts to flourish, sharing/caring with open minds & hearts. Start with the local community members who seek a better life. First Nations Bible College has courses for those who have a desire to know the Bible and Jesus's story.

- I have noticed lately that there are several new church plants in our neighbourhood, pastored and led by visionary leaders who seem committed to the evangelization and discipleship of the people in this part of town.
- I see God working through the Vancouver Urban Ministries' therapeutic tutoring program at Strathcona and MacDonald Schools. We are serving children with learning disabilities and their families. Because the need is so great for children in these schools (75 – 80% of children are more than 2 years behind), the schools accept our program and always comment on the positive results they see in the reading / math progress our children are making. We tell them we are there because we love them and care for them because of Jesus's love. They come to bimonthly family gatherings in a secular location where we are able to introduce the families to Christian thought. There we share a meal and share about the program. When Christian Festivals occur, we invited them to nearby churches who partner with us to share the love of Christ with our families.
- There are so many wonderful places. The two I most admire are The Door Is Open and the Catholic Men's Hostel because I know more about them. The Door Is Open operates every day, so there are many volunteers from everywhere. Such kindness and hospitality and generosity. Meals provided everyday. People known and welcomed. Courtesy everywhere.
- Co:Here Housing is constructing integrative holistic housing on the parking lot of Grandview Calvary Baptist Church: a creative, generous, thoughtful response that's connected to reality (also they do a community meal and prayer tent)
- Baptism still takes place. People are still being drawn to Christ and to the church. Changes to the church are slowly taking place in order for the gospel to be relevant.
- Memorials where family members re-connect with relatives who have passed away. Memorials give the opportunity to extend the grace of God. The systems of the empire tell us that the importance of a life is tied to the amount of money you have made, how many houses & cars you have. At a memorial, in God's grace it is more about the community and supporting each other and the person who has passed on. Memorials are "thin" places and are places where the Creator Spirit works.
- The weekly women's meal at Servants Vancouver. This is a small (16-20 people) community meal that takes place at the Servants House once a week and is reserved for women as a safe place for food and community as we cook together and eat family-style around the dinner table in our home. The time I have spent in the DTES has brought me to believe that women, particularly prostituted women, are among the most vulnerable in this neighbourhood full of vulnerable individuals and communities. Witnessing the women who join us each week grow in relationship with one another, providing mutual support, wisdom and care. Caring for and mentoring these women is an incredible sign of hope of the power of the Holy Spirit to bring healing and reconciliation in amazing ways. In a neighbourhood where there are many community-based services and outreach efforts that are often dominated by the majority-male population, it is a wonderful opportunity to create a safe place for women who have so much to offer us and one another. To sit together in our home, to welcome one another into each other's lives, to celebrate together, grieve together, resolve conflict together, pray together and reflect on how our faith can be lived out day to day – these gatherings are a hopeful sign of God at work in what can often be a chaotic neighbourhood full of misery and despair and isolation.
- The growing ethnic diversity of our congregation and community as a group of people on a journey with Jesus, reflecting the Kingdom of God and the neighbourhood we are called to be rooted in. This is something we have longed for and prayed for, so it has been an answer to prayers for us to be a body of people reaching out and connecting with those from all walks of life and experience impacting all parts of our neighbourhood with Kingdom good news for

transformation. Another small congregation merging with ours has strengthened us and led to another level of diversity. Growing an internship program from within our congregation & partnering with Servant Partners – an urban partnership that is on the ground, helping tremendously our vision to be a community living out the words and works of Jesus in the neighbourhood. Connecting with whoever responds to the invitations with one another and ultimately with Jesus.

- Sole Food Street Farms – a social enterprise growing food in vacant urban lots for restaurants and farmers' markets around the city. Employing underprivileged residents of the DTES and equipping them with agricultural skills in a supportive community. Runs on four lots around the DTES perimeter, started in 2010, not faith-based. Sole Food combines a redemptive vision for urban space with empowerment of marginalized people and a renewed connection with God's creation. Care of creation and of the poor are seen as mutually reinforcing and necessary overlapping strongly with the biblically informed concept of shalom.
- Earthkeepers – Christians for Climate Justice is a network of followers of Jesus across the Lower Mainland working out his teachings on ecology and climate change; has members from Baptist, Alliance, Orthodox, and Anglican churches in diverse neighbourhoods. Catalyzing Christians to socially, spiritually, politically engage our theology to our current ecological crisis.
- I will first start off with myself to show that Christ Jesus is alive in me – experiencing salvation
- Vancouver Urban Ministries works with children in Strathcona Elementary. In this school we work with a mixture of children, all struggling in school, but all wanting to thrive. One of the main areas we've seen God's hope build throughout the years is through the relationships built with the families. We are honoured by the trust that the families place in us as we teach their children and accompany them as they attend Christian summer camps.
- Street Church: The neighbourhood is surrounded by drug activity, overdoses, and people afflicted with schizophrenia. These people come to Street Church for a hot dog. When the music starts and the Word comes forth, these people get touched by the Spirit of God and leave in a more calm, peaceful way. People bow down and pray, often crying as the oppression in them makes them want to come back and ask for prayer or a hug. This was also my personal experience and therefore makes me want to help and tell them there is hope for the abused, the afflicted. Amen!
- I see hope when people recognize their mutual humanity and brokenness at the Salvation Army Anchor Church, in my chaplaincy office, and on the street. This, for me, happens most often in small gestures and conversations rather than in monumental movements of God. Much of my work is one-on-one and I often don't see the end of the story. What I do see is individuals realizing that their own methods of coping have failed, and that only Jesus is able to break down the walls of mistrust and anger that they have constructed. I see hope when I see rich and poor sitting side by side, recognizing their mutual need. The mutual respect & recognition between individuals as they share their lives, hopes and homes. Hope is an intensely human occupation. As philosopher Ivan Illich says, "Humanity has no future; institutions have a future. Humanity only has hope. By this I mean hope only exists as a human activity and it is always directed towards somebody. Hope relies on humans recognizing each other as humans and tying up their stories together. It is through looking into each other's eyes that we can see God at work."
- The convergence of different bodies of believers ... [?] ... for the betterment of all. The west coast revival is coming!
- The Truth & Reconciliation process with First Nations; a hermeneutics of hope and a hermeneutics of crucifixion, with a continuity between means and ends

## **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?**

- Drug addictions, sex, lust, pride
- Our hope is to develop the poor to be agents of transformation within their community. It is difficult to find people who have the capacity to think about the needs of their neighbours, because they are too focused on their own needs and assume someone from the outside should take care of it: fatalism, lack of capacity, lack of empowerment.
- Sexual immorality, impurity, lustful pleasures, idolatry, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, drunkenness, wild parties. Resentments, depression, isolation and lack of spiritual small groups.
- Mental illness – this often leads people to religious fanaticism or fixation preventing or frustrating actual spiritual vitality. This does not manifest itself as strongly in other neighbourhoods, but is there to a lesser degree.
- despair in education
- The neighbourhood where I live is composed mainly of socially conscious left-wing liberals who aren't Christian. They are kind but mainly very property conscious. They are self-focussed and don't understand the depths of pain affecting the Downtown Eastside. My congregation needs to release the shame, fear, resentment, guilt, anger from emotional/physical/sexual abuse and to trust in the Lord.
- Deep personal wounds in the past created a great gap between the person and God. Faith has been deeply covered by pain and frustration.
- A spirit of entitlement robs people of their dignity and removes the opportunity to give of who they are. Hopelessness – a belief that you can't get out. Isolation & loneliness – this is compounded by people having to love in SRO's (married people not permitted to live together). Leads to addiction as a way to escape pain and bring comfort.
- Independence, isolation – we are scarred, untrusting, and our guard is up – against God and others. We're in survival mode or protection mode, and we live in scarcity rather than generosity. Entitlement result from this self-centeredness. I want, therefore I deserve. I've seen this play in developers, colonizers, and soup kitchen lines.
- Addiction, low self-worth, and a culture of hiding from pain. A culture of dependency – on drugs, on services, welfare etc. Deep family / historical wounds leading to anger that is internalized and externalized. People at Sole food & Servants struggle with these!
- Disconnection – This can be seen in extremes in the neighbourhood. Strathcona is very wealthy, the Downtown Eastside is very poor. Regardless of socioeconomic status, people are isolated and alone. Addiction in its various forms, including addiction to wealth, is a way to self-soothe and deny the impact one is having on those around him or her. Without change, individuals in the city will become increasingly isolated and withdrawn. This is absolutely a spiritual malady.
- Many people suffer from depression. Many don't have good friends to encourage them and let them know they are special. Without these people in their lives, God is not present nor do they believe God comes.
- Neglect of the soul, narcissism, selfishness, entitlement, lack of giving. Generally full of damaging forms of pride, lacking in humility.
- Financial: the high cost to do ministry among people who are least able to pay for things results in the need to fundraise outside our neighbourhood, with all the problems that come with dependency and fundraising. Ghettoization of our neighbourhood, Poverty.

**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.”**

- Lack of hospitality (Ezekiel 16:48-50). The culture of Vancouver, from the time of its European Settlement, has been one of inhospitality, fuelled by racism, selfishness, and greed. Property is more important, in this mindset, than people; but land is not valued as land, but as capital. Vancouver's heart and origin, the Downtown Eastside, has suffered this, and most of its traditional inhabitants have experienced this exclusion and inhospitality. Now, with gentrification, people who have lived here for years are again being made to feel unwelcome in the one neighbourhood where they found welcome. And they are scared to move elsewhere, because they are unwelcome there as well. Their SRO apartments are considered more important than they are.
- incredible wealth, gentrification; space for artists and their community
- Gentrification: the folks who have called the Downtown Eastside home are being increasingly pushed out of the neighbourhood as high-end condos and coffee shops and restaurants sweep the "undesirable" elements of the neighbourhood further and further eastward (with help from the police). Residents from a "higher" socio-economic status are moving into the neighbourhood and displacing those who have called this place home, folks who are highly vulnerable and somewhat voiceless/powerless within the city, who live with poverty, mental illness, addiction, prostitution, etc., without consideration of the impact on them. It's heartbreaking to see.
- The "political correctness" of the broad definition of spirituality. All "spirituality" is seen as good and acceptable. There is so much confusion and ignorance of what God intended. The Enemy has used it to defeat people and cause them to seek answers in drugs, alcohol, mysticism, and even occult practices.
- The idols that threaten my [Indigenous] people are drugs and alcohol, driven by the hurts of our past, because they do not know how to deal with these

**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?**

- rising home costs, which affects everyone, resulting in people moving away to more affordable areas and to continue living in a more "disconnected" fashion (but rising costs aren't necessarily an injustice!)
- inadequate life-long and immediate mental health care, as people are self-medicating with illicit drugs. Many folks are turned away from the mental health care services that are available, while others are institutionalized and/or medicated against their will. While there are many health-care professionals within the system that treat their patients/clients with dignity and respect, the system as a whole tends to strip people of their dignity and humanity, or neglect them altogether. Many highly vulnerable people are re-traumatized by a system that ought to seek the holistic wellbeing of its clients/patients.
- Mentally ill people are on the streets and they are most likely being hurt.
- lack of support for people struggling with mental illness
- displacement by property development: developers' entitlement to the land and lack of housing causes instability, insecurity and rent increases; refugees (global displacement) also enter this housing crisis and may not feel welcome here
- gentrification and the lack/loss of social housing
- lack of affordable housing
- very low minimum wage
- poverty, ghettoization, drugs
- Some of our homeless clients were denied opportunities to get government aid (e.g., medical insurance) because they do not have a permanent address
- drugs and prostitution; theft is part of the whole scene
- impact of Residential Schools on survivors and their offspring
- corruption – immoral behaviour – within some churches

- a lack of care for the poor, in particular the elderly poor with regard to housing and hospice care. In a city where even the middle class cannot afford to own a home, the poor are really out of luck.
- poverty/homelessness: Our first priority is newcomers instead of our very own people dealing with poverty and homelessness and disparity.

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

- stigma of being a resident of the Hastings & Main area; being marginal physically and with regard to mental health; availability of affordable housing
- loss of self-worth (self-love): people feel as though they are labelled and there is no escape
- lack of value for other people – low self esteem
- poverty: very limited funding, housing, good (nutritional) food
- housing is inadequate, dirty, noisy, expensive
- Gentrification is a deep wound for the Downtown Eastside. Development is happening at a staggering rate, such that the area feels less and less safe, or “home”, for low-income people. People are having to move to other cities or neighbourhoods, leading to a slow disintegration of community. It's been difficult to tell how this affects our friends at Servants. Many have found places in other areas, then commute in to join us for dinner. Others live in somewhat more secure social housing.
- systemic dislocation; so many have been affected by the foster care system and/or residential schools, but have found themselves in the Downtown Eastside as a result of the consolidation of social housing and service providers
- The multi-generational effects of the Residential School System and the destruction of the First Nations family structure. Many other ills spring from this deep wound on the First Peoples of Canada.
- Residential Schools and the foster care system and family abandonment. The “raising” of children outside their culture, outside their family, and often in an environment of abuse, has led to untold suffering through mental illness, isolation, irreconciliation, and drug abuse. And the cycle continues into the next generation.
- Abandonment and then the process of numbing the pain. Intergenerational sense of not being worthy of love. The substances that give people a small window a month that seems to let people cope.
- Single parent families, broken families. The parent is working everyday to make ends meet, so they don't have time for their child. The impact of drugs and alcohol on children, leaving them unable to thrive in education. Their chances of success in the world are so very limited.
- systemic injustice in many layers:
  - Residential Schools and the [ongoing] damage that has caused
  - Japanese expulsion from the neighbourhood and forced interment during WW2.
  - foster care system where kids are tossed from home to home
  - welfare system that fails to empower people and keeps them in poverty
  - support systems that don't actually empower but continue to enable [dysfunctional behaviour]
  - not enough crossover and consultation between different social agencies that support people