

Kensington - Cedar Cottage (January 27, 2016)

8 people from 8 out of 38 congregations/organizations (21% representation) – two via email

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.

- new life through churches like Tenth East and Reality Church (especially revitalizing old church buildings)
- new partnerships like between Vancouver First Nazarene and Immanuel Church
- hope for new work among sex workers, via partnership between Vancouver First Nazarene, Immanuel Church, and the Mount Pleasant Neighbourhood House – and a desire to make this happen
- investment into the Kingsway corridor bringing new residential and business space; there's a sense of it being on the up and up!
- Welcome House will be a one-stop centralized complex opening in May 2016. It will be the place where all immigrants and refugees con on arrival in Vancouver and will serve the Lower Mainland. In addition to housing, they will provide PTSD counselling, language training, legal aid, a food bank, computer access, etc. – all under one roof. Funding for Welcome House has come from the federal, provincial, and municipal governments and is unique possibly in the world. Lakeview Multicultural United had Chris Friesen, the Director, come to Sunday worship to speak to our congregation about their work, and we have expressed interest in helping new immigrants and refugees adjust to life in Canada. Lakeview's members are almost all immigrants themselves and understand the challenges of being new to the country. We have applied to the Presbytery's Provision Fund to do training this spring and fall to do eight friendship dinners – two per month for families from Welcome House. We have also met with the Christian Reformed Church next door to work with them. Our congregation is also working with Grace Memorial United to sponsor a Syrian refugee family.
- Feedback from unchurched individuals in the community
 - some have recommended new residents to come to our church
 - a recent call from a local resident, asking me to reach out to a co-worker who was a new immigrant to Canada, lonely and without support
- Reinhardt Bourke Ministries choosing Vancouver to do a city-wide outreach in a stadium (end of the year)
- Billy Graham Association [Franklin Graham] choosing Vancouver to do a city-wide outreach in March 2017.
- I am very new to the neighbourhood – less than 5 months – so I have greater insight in to the local church [Vancouver First Nazarene] than the community. Significantly, a movement is taking place this fall in the church and neighbourhood was a discussion on developing a community response to sex work in our neighbourhood. One sign that this is of God is that it is a project that brought together church leaders, neighbours, government and social organizations. Our church has an opportunity to partner with another

congregation and SAFE in Collingwood in an outreach/care project to ‘working girls’ in our neighbourhood through a pop-up health clinic. It is of God in that the response is born out of love, not fear.

- Cedar Cottage Neighbourhood House at 22nd and Victoria. There are about 10 of these Neighbourhood Houses in the city, coming out of Jane Addams’ Settlement House movement in late 1800s Chicago; the NH Association is one of the oldest charities in the province. CCNH is truly community-based, with many of its programs suggested by, or even run by, local resident volunteers. They have something for every age group and in many languages: food, art, crafts, kids, elders, celebration. It’s a true “third place”. It has strong ties with Selkirk Elementary the Parks Board. Throughout the NH network there are many Christians quietly living out their faith as staff or core volunteers. It reflects God’s character in the way it fosters community within the diversity of the city, where everyone is seen to have something to contribute. What if each church were such a hub?
- The greatest sign of hope in our neighbourhood in the past 2-3 years is the number of coffee shops opening up within a short walking distance of our church property. These ‘third place’ Canadian pubs are filled with mostly young ‘hipsters’ and ‘creatives’ many of them with primary age children. This is a missing demographic in our congregation and one that God seems to be drawing to our doorstep. The culture-shaping potential of this demographic is extensive. We have noticed these people connecting with our church [Glad Tidings] through one of our community ministries called, Aspire Music Academy. We have noticed this ministry growing in numbers and the majority of students coming from our neighbourhood. We also thank God for the congregations he is planting in our neighbourhood that seem to be poised both stylistically and ethno-linguistically for this demographic. I believe this is a sign of God’s grace pointing to the redemptive work of Christ among all peoples in Vancouver. This sign of God’s activity stands out to me because of the way two young congregations moved into the neighbourhood along with the start of Aspire Music Academy just prior to these coffee shops opening up within a relatively short period of time. The transformative power of the gospel is being put to work through gospel relationships being cultivated through music and coffee culture. I can see God drawing people together in community with a hunger for His kingdom and the hope of finding Jesus.
- A sign of hope in the neighbourhood is families with young children. This seems to have brought “new life” in the neighbourhood, as well as a greater sense of security. Without being aware of all the facts, I have noticed signs of a greater sense of community and some openness to church-related community events. I think this reflects the heart of God as it pertains to hospitality and openness. God welcomes people. The question I ponder is how this is best facilitated from the church point of view. Are community-minded events the best way, or simply “grassroots” Christians serving in “non-Christian” community oriented organizations? Or both perhaps?
- Another sign I see of God’s grace is the multi-ethnic make up of the community and also the church congregation. God has a missionary heart for the nations right in “our own back yard” as well. How does the church be church to people of all nations in a Canadian/Vancouver context?

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?

- The main spiritual challenges confronting our neighbourhood is pseudo-connectivity counterfeiting as true biblical community, moralistic therapeutic deism replacing the gospel of the kingdom, apathy toward our gospel identity and unbelief in the power of the gospel to change lives.
- I think time is a huge challenge for parishioners and non-parishioners alike. How does time reflect spiritual and missional priorities? Being in an urban context proves to be a smorgasbord of what people can do with discretionary time ... if they even have any.
- the drive to get ahead, or really simply to keep up – no time for asking deeper questions about life's meaning; distractions galore
- questions of meaning and belonging, absence of community, loneliness and isolation – compounded by addiction and mental illness, broken family structure, poverty, and [?] Lives of quiet desperation
- hyper-diversity makes it difficult to formulate a cohesive self-image, let alone family/community
- loss of settled history or a larger story that gives people a sense of their place in the world, direction for life, motivation for sacrificial choices
- disconnection: no sense of belonging, isolation, no sense of care or responsibility for each other. This plays out in the lives of sex workers and working dads as it does in retirees and single moms. And it plays out in the lives of the people at [X] church too. This is a city-wide problem but *perhaps* the Kingsway corridor's lack of a 'centre' makes it feel worse here?
- isolation, cocooning. You cannot love your neighbour if you don't know who they are. If you never talk, initiate, or engage. Wrapped up in our own problems and issues, fearful, protective, "minding our own business" and can't be bothered. Don't have time, energy or inclination due to the cost. Yes, these are the same issues [that affect my congregation] but some are pushing back against these pressures and creating spaces.
- Whatever I want to do is okay. Indulgence. What works for me. Relativism.

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.”

- leisure / pleasure (not that leisure is inherently evil): seems to be an idol, elevated beyond many other values. People live for the weekend, for skiing, soccer, sports, activities. Someone recently told they not attend the “church of hockey.” People pay huge premiums to live here in order to be a part of the Vancouver lifestyle.
- individualism / ethnocentricity
- selfishness / security
- spirit of territorialism which even pre-dates colonization – multiple tribes living on the bay or river; fierce protection of hereditary sites for food and natural resource
- hopelessness
- meaninglessness
- not finding sense in life
- materialism impoverishes people striving to get the 'good life'
- loneliness, isolation – “cocooning”
- lostness
- secularism, secular moralism
- secularism = bully
- patterns of destructive behaviour caused by early childhood abuse

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?

- The most damaging social injustice that I'm aware of in our neighbourhood is child poverty. It is one of the reasons we started Aspire Music Academy and also opened our gym to accommodate the Youth of recent immigrant families in Canada. Aboriginal youth and new Canadian youth account for the greatest numbers of children living below the Canadian poverty line in Vancouver.
- To be honest, this is an area not explored. I just know that finances are always a big issue, especially in a city where cost of living is high.
- Actually, I'm pretty sure this is not the most damaging social injustice in our neighbourhood, but it's the one that I have the greatest passion for: sex workers. They stand on the corners, seen by everybody and nobody. People want them moved on. They leave needles and condoms everywhere. They use our carparks and alleys for their business. They crap in our stairwells. And sadly – NO this does not affect our people much at all.
- The great divide between the 'home-owners and renters! It affects where their kids go to school. It affects the type of programs they can afford. It affects their access to post-secondary education. It prevents healthy social integration! So much attention to the homeless; little attention given to those 'trying to stay above the water-line' because of the price of housing.

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

- People feel powerless. The disparity between income and the cost of living, especially housing creates tension between realistic life expectations and the lifestyles promised by the media. The quality of life is diminishing in Vancouver. Less compassion and [?]
- Isolation, disconnection, loneliness, lack of meaningful community and friendship. People don't know their neighbours. Some are friendly, but it doesn't translate into meaningful friendships.
- Kingsway itself = it's been a commuter corridor from the start, which divides Cedar Cottage from Kensington and isn't oriented to local residents. The neighbourhood lacks a centre, which leaves us with the impression that we're just for passing through, an in-between place.