

Victoria-Fraserview & Killarney (January 28, 2016)

10 people from 9 out of 38 congregations/organizations (24% 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.

- I live in Burnaby and pastor a fairly new church in Vancouver – my knowledge of the neighbourhood is in a learning stage. What I do see is that when people have tried everything else to fix their problems, then they walk into a church for prayer. I may not see them again but I know God has started doing something in their life. I'm thankful for Pilgrim Baptist Church for all their support.
- from my parish: Killarney Park Mennonite Brethren Pre-School is a representation of the neighbourhood. It's mini United Nations. We have an unashamedly Christian curriculum, but we have students who come from a wide variety of faith perspectives and lifestyles. Our school is a symbol of the future: hope, signs of life, joy, unity. We have an open portal into the family unit through the pre-school as we minister to families' felt needs. We also have a moms support group.
- The Collingwood and South Vancouver Neighbourhood Houses have resources for newcomers and refugees, and we have people directly involved in their programs of welcome.
- Mennonite Central Committee's New Foundations program for the most vulnerable of refugees: single parents living with HIV/AIDS. Our fellowship hosts this justice/mercy ministry.
- The Killarney Community Centre is a gathering place for the nations, for first and second generations. It's a very busy space, highly utilized with much community harmony and facility.
- The Metro Vancouver Alliance is bringing together faith groups, unions, and neighbourhood houses under Deborah Littmann's leadership to focus on community-based solutions for social isolation, poverty, transit, and housing.
- Friday mornings at Faith Fellowship Baptist, between 9am and 10:30am, are one of the most encouraging signs of God's work that I see. Our foodbank is not just a place of handing out food. It has become a place of community where staff and volunteers mingle and encourage, pray and support the wounded and weary. After the foodbank, at 11am, we have a one hour cross-cultural leadership class that draws leaders from 50 nations and many different churches to learn and share together. The lunch afterward is a great mixer where ideas and life stories are shared. This is the highlight of many people's week. Pastor Mark Buhler is a key force behind this from a human perspective. This sign stands out because of the joy I see in the people who gather. They come to be with each other. As they are welcomed they become open to what God is offering. Unity across differences is increased. Understanding is gained. Faith is built. Witness is sharpened and released back into the community. We are a learning lab where interns and teams

from different churches in western Canada have come to equip their leaders and volunteers in cross-cultural ministry.

- Faith Fellowship's refugee ministry [New Hope Community Services Society] has helped 356 refugees from 44 countries; now relocating to Surrey
- Faith Fellowship has recruited Peter Park to coordinate First Nations cross-cultural outreach to Lillooet; he took 32 people from 4 different ethnic churches last summer.
- Faith Fellowship also does outreach to Muslims in the neighbourhood, ESL classes in conjunction with the Neighbourhood House, and hosts New Hope Childcare for 50-60 families.
- El Redentor [meets at Faith Fellowship Baptist] is a Spanish church that live streams to 10,000 Spanish speakers worldwide.
- The community is responding more to the gospel. They come to church [Breakthrough Church of God] and welcome church activities in the area – Saturday outreach, and Canada Day Festival. Church goers have increased commitment: more people are responding to water baptism, more volunteers are stepping up to the plate. Our space is maxed out and people are inviting/telling/showing – to come to Jesus.
- Subtle yet powerful [at First Lutheran]: God witnessed in deepening relationships. Increasing desire to be in vulnerable, authentic relationship with church members (commuter church) – a culture of shame prevailed. New people are willing to journey intentionally alongside each other, supporting in prayer and doing acts of service
 - spontaneous acts of kindness with members and those in the neighbourhood
 - church is sponsoring a refugee family in July who have been 10 years in a camp
 - deepening connections with the neighbourhood through Collingwood Neighbourhood House ESL program and the Metro Vancouver Alliance
 - converse with people in the neighbourhood (I live in the area) and am developing relationships with neighbours. We always have an open door at the church for those needing food, etc., and pastoral visitation
 - people willing to overcome the barriers of social isolation, and avail themselves to journey with others in the neighbourhood.
 - affordable housing on church property, collaborating with government
 - this event! [the focus group] People willing to collaborate, share hope and inspire each other
- The Evangelical Lutheran Synod (and First Lutheran Church) connecting with The Missional Network and Alan Roxburgh, beginning to see what God is up to in the neighbourhood and transform into a more missional church.
- Collingwood Baptist is becoming more and more a venue for (or community of) service. We see this in our willingness to open our church for community functions such as being a polling place in the recent federal election. Also, we partner with Vancouver Urban Ministries, which serves disadvantaged children in Strathcona. A good example of what VUM is doing is their After School Program in schools in the Strathcona area. Currently we are considering opening our doors to a Narcotics Anonymous group. People in our church are becoming more outwardly focussed. This is important because, in order for us to fulfill our mandate, we need to be "in the world (but not of it)." The salt must get out of the saltshaker.
- The willingness of various churches (including ours – Collingwood Baptist) to work cooperatively together to accomplish God's Kingdom work. An example of this is our partnership with two other churches to plant a church in the River District. As we work in unity, the world sees the reality.
- I meet many people who are open to friendship/relationship/community throughout our region. Our food bank community [at Faith Fellowship Baptist] is often where we see that the most, but also in shops, temples, and restaurants. It grows in small groups we organize. And for some, it flourishes in church, but especially in home visitations. Mentoring.

- We [Harvest City] are a commuter church but 50% live within a 10-minute drive. God is moving in the following ways:
 - our monthly prayer events are yielding healing and depth
 - our Leadership University offers monthly free education courses
 - many non-Christians attend our young adult ministry, usually drawn from our outreach to Langara College; we encourage these kids to volunteer serving the homeless at Gospel Mission [in the Downtown Eastside] and they in turn are exposed to the Gospel.
 - our online ministry because of ads and campaigns
 - our day care centre
 - bread ministry is helping the South Vancouver Community Centre
 - business evangelism – getting to know the owners of Victoria Drive shops
 - Vancouver Pastors Prayer Fellowship meets monthly at Harvest City and helps unify across denominations
 - church partnerships beyond the usual lines – Pentecostals with Baptists, Alliance with [?]
 - Crave Church is huge and growing! Good things are reported from the Finnish [Pentecostal Assemblies] Church.
- Refugee sponsorship spearheaded by a member of our congregation [Wilson Heights United]. She rallied the congregation and sought out community partners, with the support of the congregation, to make the sponsorship possible. She also worked with our parish to expand the potential field of community partners. Our church operates an advocacy program that is funded by the parish. Our church structure is being revised to eliminate the parish level of governance in the next three years. So parish members are advocating for the parish-sponsored ministries to be included in and funded by the new structure so that our advocacy program and our youth & young adult ministries are not lost. Our advocacy program assists low-income people with disabilities, seniors, and the homeless with help for navigating the bureaucracies of government and community agencies, to improve their circumstances and to be treated with dignity. We also serve a free monthly hot meal, an emergency food pantry. We connect with other faith groups and people of faith who support our aims to serve the marginalized – Hunger Bites Club, St Faith's Anglican Church Pastoral Resource Centre.

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?

- Age, language, money, health, mobility, isolation. Our people face these same challenges.
- Desperation, isolation, apathy, loneliness. The poor are struggling to survive and everyone else is struggling not to become poor. This breeds competition for limited resources and promotes isolation as people focus on their own needs without regard for the needs of others, which leads to apathy. Essentially, people are worn out and stressed out and their isolation and focus on their own needs and struggles highlights their loneliness.
- apathy / laziness / greed
- indifference towards religion/spirituality – too busy
- anger – people are stressed and rundown in our neighbourhood
- isolation and transition – fear, suspicion, lack of trust, relocation

- Cults: Joyce Station is a key area for the cults to target commuters. The curious, the isolated, and the ignorant are caught in their web. They exploit the growing distrust of “organized religion” by portraying themselves as the answer.
- Work schedules: people who would like to attend church services are not able to, owing to work (very apparent in our church)
- Acceptance / Political Correctness: our elementary school across the street is really pushing equality for LGBT in the new curriculum; they have hate / unacceptance towards us; dealing with the spirit behind this enmity but don’t know what to do
- critical spirit – non / [?]; Trinity Western Law School is an example
- Bondage to drug addiction
- fear / unbelief: will God provide? expectations / materialism; all roads lead to the same God
- security: shelter, physical safety, economic security; fear: of the economy, “the other”, change (of culture or demographics), home invasion, death/sickness
- greed: materialism, self-sufficiency, complacency
- materialism: both our community and church are caught up trying to make payments for home, car, etc.; too busy getting the comforts of life – they end up not having time for the more important things in life!
- soon as we leave our bubble, the spirit of mammon is huge
- disunity – with churches heading out to the suburbs, those of left in Vancouver need to stick together; the challenge is to make it happen and keep it together
- addictions: lack of meaning/fullness
- distrust of the “other” (also affects people I serve): don’t believe we are made in the image of God, self + others; don’t believe/fear in God being at work in the world, in our lives = doubt God’s presence. Don’t trust in God’s role in giving/ascertaining a future of hope; fear that God is punishing and not blessing = difficulty of believing in the theology of the Cross, their image of God is skewed in that they don’t believe God is compassionate.
- mental health (seniors dementia; BC Housing)
- financial stress – poverty, debt, housing, food costs
- mobility
- technology – information overload
- The plurality of religious options makes it confusing to find common ground.
- distrust of institutions/religion

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.”

- Despair, discouragement, poverty, mental illness, agnosticism/unbelief, relational break down, loneliness, immorality.
- power, wealth = hedonism; structures: city hall

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?

- Quality and cost of rental housing – can’t afford it.
- Lack of affordable housing. There are a plethora of causes to this problem; some are macro-economic (limited amount of land to build on)
- lack of safe, secure, affordable housing. There are many causes: lack of land to build on, growing gap between the rich and the poor, lack of government subsidized housing to meet the need, tenancy legislation and lack of enforcement at tenancy tribunals. People

live on the street or in sub-standard housing. Unscrupulous landlords and tenants exploiting the weaknesses in the system and/or the vulnerability of tenants/landlords. People are going without medication or food so they can pay rent for substandard, unhealthy living conditions

- unaffordable housing; absentee landlords. Our young adults and families relocate to the suburbs. Families of 3-5 are living in poorly lit or furnished basement suites; our child demographic is shrinking
- housing: prejudiced landlords, expensive accommodation, pressure on families, isolation of the impoverished, single parents
- generational / cultural gaps
- lack of recognition of First Nations
- refugees required to repay loans [for getting to Canada]
- single parents – MSP premiums
- poverty
- poverty: mental illness, immigration (ESL), high cost of living, family tensions, no time
- discrimination, poverty: (also affects the people I serve) fear/reality of the lack of internal or external resources (insufficient networking done despite the resources available); fear of being in relationship and being unacceptable to others as we are; myth/fear of not being worthy of care
- individualistic understanding of social problems, mental illness, “failure” = not a systemic view of social problems, don’t have a sense of interdependency and how our system sabotages the success of all – [only a] minority are successful
- sex trafficking
- We had married men struggling with paying for sex. We discovered from them that there are 10 brothels and massage parlours along Victoria Drive between 33rd and 54th, with many independent ones nearby. We have been praying and only one has closed so far. Most of their clients are blue collar working men (construction/contracting) who are unsatisfied in their marriages, are dual income families and don’t see their spouse, and have mortgages to pay and feel locked. Two sex-workers have been saved at our church so far; they are immigrants who need money to settle but have no support system in place.

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

- loneliness
- The clear sense of disconnection, isolation, and loneliness people experience. People are coming to live in Collingwood from many differing places and backgrounds. There seem to be few avenues for people to make connections with one another. Root causes: fear (i.e., to try to speak English with an ESL speaker), mistrust, prejudice. To certain extent we see this isolation in our church as well.
- Anger / stress. Money seems to be an issue. People are greedy and believe they deserve the toys (vacation car, house) but go into debt to achieve it. They are now locked into jobs and are angry at their situation.