

Sunset (January 14, 2016)

11 people from 8 out of 32 congregations/organizations (25% representation)

WHAT IS GOD DOING?

- Some hopeful signs: Inner Hope Youth Ministries, Place of Refuge, Drop-in Centre, Punjabi-speaking churches. Most hopeful: Amie Peacock at South Vancouver Neighbourhood House, works specifically with seniors (ESL, social activities, etc.) and is part of the Metro Vancouver Alliance's "Social Inclusion" group. She is a devoted Christian who sees her work as ministry and is very dynamic and personable. She is working to bring people together to bring glory to God.
- Place of Refuge Transitional [second stage] Housing Program provides long-term supports for addiction recovery for nine residents at a time. The message of Christ is brought forward through four supporting churches and all the people in each congregation. We have a weekly Bible study which introduces men to Christ. I see and experience the evidence by the many men who come to Christ while living at Place of Refuge; further evidence is the grace they have been given on their path to freedom from addiction. The neighbourhood views Place of Refuge as an asset in the community.
- The most hopeful sign of Gods' activity in our particular area of Sunset is the Drop-In Centre that we run as a ministry of this congregation [First United Mennonite]. The Drop-in Centre is a Thursday afternoon hang-out for older elementary school kids especially from Henderson Elementary. Every week we get on average of 20-30 kids who enjoy hanging out, playing games, eating snacks. They associate the drop-in centre with church, and it is a great way for us to build relationships with them (we are a church that doesn't have many kids, youth, or the like, and so wouldn't naturally have a connection with these kids). We have recently also started a Tuesday Bible Club as well, which is much less attended but builds our relationships, as well as movie nights, community meals, etc. Some of the kids are Christian, most are not. I see God using this as a way for us to bless our neighbourhood, and maybe draw them to God.
- I cannot stray from the milestone of Newbern's [Memorial Alliance] 40th anniversary, which we are celebrating in 2016. Being practically new in this church family, nothing gets me more excited than the thought of being able to remember, refocus, and recommit to Christ as a church body. I sense an opportunity for us as a local body to revisit our core beliefs and values as a church; in other words, if we were starting Newbern brand new, how would do it? What sorts of things need to define us as a church? God has placed on my mind over the last couple of months about how we, as a community of churches in a broader sense, can make an impact on this city.
- The most hopeful sign: the diversity of ethnic groups. The South Hill region used to be a German community. However, years later, due to the influx of immigrants from all over the world, the South Hill and Sunset regions are becoming multi-ethnic regions. We used to say that 'missional fields' are in the overseas

countries. However, now God has brought the mission fields from overseas to Canada. The Fraser Street has many different ethnic restaurants and bakeries that attract people to come and dine. The banks are attracting working class people to come to work.

- Signs of the Kingdom: a number of our members live within a few blocks of the Christ City building and we've noticed are members increasingly engaging their community/neighbours with the gospel. I think of local moms experience community and support at our Mom & Tot's group, as well as the celebratory atmosphere on the steps of our building during our Halloween Festival. I see God calling our people to greater faithfulness in the physical space they find themselves in.
- Corporate renewal of Christ-followers through closing a ministry to offer space for a new church. This is the South Hill Mennonite Brethren / Christ City story. Permanence and incarnational momentum. New believers and fallen-away people returning. South Vancouver youth participating in The Chapel, which was an idea launched out of this neighbourhood, South Hill's building, John Oliver High School, and beyond. South Van daycamp unity – plans to cover every week of the summer.
- I see people moving into the neighbourhood for the purpose of mission, even at personal cost. This personal investment incarnates the gospel and enables something organic and relational to grow here. These people are practically engaging with the lost and creating space for God's Spirit to do His work.
- Our church sponsors a block party for the neighbourhood usually in early July. We close off the street and bring in games for kids, provide food and entertainment and prizes. We invite our neighbours and have 100s respond. The neighbours enjoy the party and respond in good numbers. We have people who make an effort to speak to those who come, and share about the church. We have seen growing appreciation for the church and less complaining about the inconveniences the church causes. There have been opportunities to share the gospel directly as well as through deeds. Trust this effort reflects the gospel favourably on those of different faith backgrounds, many of whom attend this event.
- graveside: explaining living faith in sad times
- social aspect: Union Gospel Mission
- the biggest and nicest church is on Monday morning: Where is God? Not in buildings but in the hearts of those who love him

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?

- greed or the love of money; fulfilling the dreams of prosperity; coming out of misplaced priorities in life – same for the neighbourhood as for our church
- self-sufficiency; wealth, success

- love of money
- no desire to address spiritual questions
- The main spiritual challenge I see facing my neighbourhood as well as my congregation is apathy stemming from over-busyness. I see myself, my congregation, and my neighbourhood being too busy for conversation, for forming and building relationships, and for discipleship; which leads into a tangible lack of passion, lack of reflection, and lack of following.
- nominalism: just going along with the faith of your parents/grandparents/ethnic group without thinking about or claiming faith for yourself; same as for our ministry participants
- In the view of the Chinese in this area, I observed that most of the Chinese people or Asians have been approached by Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, and some other mysterious spiritual groups such as Faluen Gong. This has become a new kind of challenge to non-Christian people. They become very reserved towards any of these groups.
- Hyper-individuality that manifests itself as a suspicion of organized religion, and the pursuit of self-fulfillment as the over-arching purpose of life. The result is spiritual, social, and personal loneliness. 1/3 of people say that it is hard to make friends in Vancouver, and 22% describe themselves as lonely (2014 stats)
- To me, the biggest spiritual challenge is simply the vast diversity of culture and backgrounds. Because of how many messages we hear about what is good, people don't really know where to turn or how to tell the differences. Such things range from lifestyle choices to purpose in life, to all sorts of values and beliefs. Too many messages bring de-sensitization. I would say the general sense of ambiguity definitely affects the people I work directly with.
- different cultures bring different "spiritual" upbringing along; rituals and festivities make us fall for it, i.e., Chinese New Year, Punjabi "Easter Hure [meaning Vaisakhi?]" celebration
- Sikh strongholds
- division between churches

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?

- believing the lie that spirituality is good and religion is bad, that faith is private not public, and that there is no such thing as sin
- I would say the evil that marks our neighbourhood is active addiction, gangs, and the danger this brings to the safety of our community.

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?

- greed/affordability – the wealth gap is having social effect, specifically related to housing (both ownership and rentals)

- lack of external supports for mental health, women with children, and affordable housing
- The government's support and funding towards psychological and psychiatric counselling and treatment are greatly cut down.

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

- trauma, disconnection from family and friends, mental health issues
- The population of the ethnic groups is constantly changing.
- materialism (2x)
- loneliness – no one knows or trusts their neighbours
- racism – distrust of other ethnic groups
- For this particular congregation, and its ties to the change in the demographic of the neighbourhood, is a sense in the midst of decline, or revelling in the glory days of the past instead of moving forward. This congregation used to have 600-800 members, largely due to a big influx of Mennonite immigration. But now we have an average of about 100 in attendance, as people have gone elsewhere and/or moved to the Valley. Coupled with this is the housing crisis and not being able to hold onto young families who move to the suburbs. The church, though, isn't able to get over this and seek new passion/life.
- broken homes: alcohol, low income rental; pursuit of self-fulfillment over community/family health; 1st and 2nd generation immigrant gap. Resulting loneliness and suspicion of people in general and organizations in particular. The church needs to provide a healthy model and experience of relationship (with God and one another).
- The biggest wound to me in our neighbourhood of Newbern Alliance is that there is little to no presence of Jesus and the Church.
- **neighbourhood:** not being accepted as a person from a different race, language barriers, financial predicament and challenges; **for the church:** not belonging to the "cool" and "educated", second and first generation people coming to Vancouver
- **neighbourhood:** being in a "hyper-diverse" city but not knowing how to deal with that or simply by virtue of being new immigrants not expecting it; **parishioners:** struggle to handle living in a hyper-diverse community yet coming from a strongly mono-cultural family and church
- **neighbourhood:** transitioning demographics – elderly German speakers who've seen a lot of change, Punjabi majority slowly moving out to Surrey ... the neighbourhood is changing, but how? Who will be here in 20 years? Will gentrification move south down Fraser? **Parishioners:** sense of church dwindling, young families moving to the Valley because they can't afford to live here