

West Side (January 28, 2016)
UBC, Point Grey, Kitsilano, Dunbar, Arbutus Ridge, Kerrisdale

25 people from 13 out of 56 congregations/organizations (23% 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.

Near church in Dunbar area:

- Social housing at 16th & Dunbar
- Many of our church members are engaged in Christian organizations
- I would bring people to our small groups, services for community, prayer, shared life, healing and hospitality

Near where I live in Strathcona/Chinatown:

- Strathcona Church is a hub for numerous congregations and organizations, Chinese seniors fellowship
- I would bring people to Salvation Army / Grace Mansion who are working with addictions
- There are community associations and co-operative housing in the neighbourhood
- St. James Music School is a gift of music to children in DTES
- I've heard about Saige Community Food Bank started by Christians in the area
- New organization: Earth Keepers – climate justice

West Point Grey United Church has many forms of community involvement (carolling, concerts, voting location, exercise classes, yard sales etc.) This stands out because to me it is a picture of a church attempting, quite successfully, to be the hub of the community. It displays God's creativity. The bringing of people together in a city known for its loneliness. Getting people into a religious building.

A long standing fellowship of church ministries (Westside Pastors' Prayer Fellowship) on the west side (30+years). It has been blessed with great facilitators who were willing to serve by bringing others together monthly. This group is a testimony to the unity & fellowship of the people of God. The ability to encourage and share in both joys and challenges in our part of town. This leads to long-term friendships & relationships.

at Marineview Chapel

- Moms group bringing believing and non-believing moms together for friendship & support
- Finding a language that we can all speak and understand despite our differences
- Grappling with global & personal issues and looking for positive ways forward in our lives
- Building deep community not just scratching the surface
- Being real about struggles and our own faults and learning from each other
- Showing an approachable face of God and His church
- Breaking through neighbourhoods mentality of isolation & independence
- Helping each other raise our kids respectfully and wisely

- Strengthening women and their marriages / significant relationships

Softening at Marineview Chapel

For years people at Marineview have been taught and encouraged to build “no strings attached” friendships with people in their neighbourhood to whom they are naturally attracted (an easy fit is a good fit). At first, all we experienced was the recognition that most of our neighbours are VERY far from organized religion and no one is hungry for the good news we are trying to share. We shifted our focus to people who might be considered “poor in spirit” (lonely, discouraged, peripheral, etc.) and changed our message to simply sharing our story of the difference that our relationship with God makes. Gradually, we began to see a trickle of friends open up (soften) and begin to share their lives with us. Some are coming to church, most are not, but simply open to meeting more people from our church in natural social situations. It’s three steps forward, two steps back; but they are moving closer to God and His Kingdom. He is drawing them to Himself through us!

Connecting with people, getting involved in each other’s lives, breaking past individual isolating walls. This is happening both within the Marineview congregation and externally, not due to a program, but as an organic extension from our community. Emphasizing the external ...

- members knowing who lives near them or those connected in other ways such as parent/playground groups
- some members make a point of chatting with people in otherwise quiet areas (primarily Dunbar) which are typically more isolationist (family units doing their own thing)
- non-believers who are very far from considering church are being drawn into community events like game nights

This stands out because Vancouver is a LONELY place. People crave connection, at the same time as they shy away from it. Breaking down walls of respectful (and maybe resentful, at times) silence and non-interaction is a way of affirming and re-awakening to the fact that we are created for community. It allows people to see that they don’t have to “go it alone” in the hard stuff of life. It feels small, still. Early stages of reaching out in relationship ... but it’s the presence of God breaking down walls.

People are hungry to connect with other human beings. We (at Love Vancouver Vineyard) have noticed how much people want to know others and to be known. We invited new people to our home for dinner and it has been warmly received. So we are starting a monthly dinner club. We put up a flier just a few days ago and have already received a number of inquiries. The idea of “life together” is something that is deep within us, put there by God. In a large and fast city like Vancouver where surface relationships are the norm, the idea of really connecting and doing life with others seems to be one of the ways God is making himself known. As a new church planter in Vancouver, we want to champion the idea of life together and see Jesus in our midst.

We are new to the city so this is difficult to answer well, having such a short view into what’s happening. However, our church plant has been having monthly prayer & worship gatherings (two so far) in the Creekside Community Centre. At our last one, we had members & leaders from two other Vineyard churches in the area join us. The willingness of believers to gather & pray not just for their churches, but for churches throughout Vancouver has been deeply encouraging. As a new church plant, we have been receiving counsel that (among other things), if we focus on prayer this first year, it will have been a success. The Lord moves through the prayers of His children, so I see this gathering of Christians as evidence that He is at work throughout Vancouver.

The compassionate response to the Syrian tragedy. Our congregation raised \$80k to sponsor 10 Syrian Armenians, established a welcome team, and the excitement is growing. Comes out of a desire to BLESS and love in Jesus’ name. This is multiplied around the city – we know of a group of five, who are not card-carrying Christians, bringing in a family. We are encouraging them and sharing

our learning and resources. It lines up with God's heart to rescue and save, and it is a visible demonstration of Good News to the poor.

People are "getting it and doing it" at Granville Chapel

- ESL Ministry – have students (mostly Chinese) from the neighbourhood attending classes throughout the week. We've established relationships, a sense of community, "welcome", hospitality and new faith.
- Crisis Pregnancy Centre Office – strengthens relationships with the church community through community meals, families loving families, support, encouragement, compassion.
- Community Group Innovation – throughout different neighbourhoods: Marpole, Cambie and 39th, West 16th, Fraser, Westside, Brazilian community – shared lives, growing an invitational culture – BLESS (– daily missional living).
- Refugee Sponsorships – growing compassion – 10 sponsored – reflects an openness to the Holy Spirit

An overall sense that people want to connect and work towards a common goal. There are lots of signs among local businesses and groups of neighbours. The magazine *Dunbar Life* and especially things like the neighbourhood patrol. For our church to work together with a group / business have come up when our pre-school had to close and the space became available. The preschool and kindergarten has created an opportunity for us to work together with a secular organization that in many ways has similar values around excellent childcare. God's challenge to us seems to let His light shine through our work together, sharing the space, helping each other, and finding ways to partner in good work that is happening.

Even though it seems that the church ministry is struggling sometimes in a frustrating way, one or two people (non-believers) keep coming and responding to the Gospel of Christ. Most of them are young people, which I believe (hope) is the sign of the return of the next generation. In the midst of the enormous impact of secular culture, we have seen some people stay very faithful to the Lord.

- "CHAPEL" youth ministry. The "in-thing" in Vancouver is spreading wider. The leadership's determination to not let the "happening" that has been successful become an end itself but to see it be redemptive and a re-connecting influence among all youth, families & communities. Until Chapel's impact sees Jesus in schools, youth clubs & community youth groups, it has not been obedient to God.
- A Syrian Arabic church in Richmond & Surrey led by both Arabic newcomers & Canadian born or naturalised people.
- The spirit of the welcoming centre for newcomers at YVR.
- The food bank & other caring agencies in Vancouver & lower mainland

The majority of the people in my neighbourhood are non-Caucasians who just came to Vancouver a few years ago. 50% of the students at UBC are Asian. There is a significant number of Mandarin speakers living in Vancouver who are either new immigrants or new students who are curious about Western culture and Christianity. International young professionals are open to new things, new learning. It's a great era for Christians to reach out to the international people. Vancouver is a huge mission field in view of the new internationals.

- I see every church congregation and building as evidence of God's continuing initiative to bring about the marriage of heaven & earth (as in the Lord's prayer).
- Countless individual initiatives/responses to the Holy Spirit, leading people to give themselves towards others.
- Consortium of churches on the westside working together (for 20 yrs) to support refugees

- Fellowships of pastors praying together. Members of different churches connecting/working together to make links and reach out. Enormous cohort of volunteers in Vancouver working to care for others (health/palliative care), help children, make society better.

People working together across denominational & organizational borders. They sense the Kingdom presence in all of these evangelical organizations. One woman I talked to was involved in three different churches on a given Sunday. A student who attends two different services. The number of different churches involved in Missions Fest. This sense of the Kingdom presence is very refreshing where churches & Christian organizations have a fluidity and openness toward one another. Expect to see great things happening in Vancouver when Christians are in unity about the core Christian truths and yet open to one another in spite of differences.

- Gathering newcomers (mainland Chinese) in need of social interactions, adapting to Vancouver culture
- Stabilizing [presence of] long-time Christians hanging in, praying for direction
- Outreach, sharing the gospel with newcomers.
- Learners or re-learners of God's word.
- Large in-flux of international students in neighbourhoods and high schools
- Stable and aging households have group need of care
- family populations in the Kerrisdale community centre and library
- good and thriving commercial activities along the main corridors

Generous, community-minded people & neighbours

- Community centres (Dunbar & Kerrisdale) are a hub for real connections between people seeking friendship and others to do life with
- Street blocks and my apartment building in Kerrisdale, where there are people who want to know each other, interact, share meals & activities
- An openness to welcome immigrants and help them integrate
- Fostering activities that build community– neighbourhood business associations taking the lead
- Some people in my church go beyond friendliness to *friendship* with neighbours; sometimes I see non-Christians do this better. I see God's answer to loneliness and isolation in these movements and long for more Christians & churches to be intentional in this.

Amongst UBC international students, God is drawing many to commit their lives to Christ and be baptized. They are mostly from China although our weekly F.O.C.U.S. (Friends of Overseas College & University Students) Club is open to all nationalities. We meet on Friday nights at the student union building on campus for dinner, worship and bible study. About 50% of the 30-45 students are non-Christians. The typical movement of a student's journey to faith can be summed up as: "I come for the food, I stayed for the friendship, I found faith." Three elements the students discover are Family (sense of belonging), Safety (can ask anything), Honesty (leaders are authorities).

Our congregation (Dunbar Heights Baptist) is beginning to consider simple, everyday ways to serve, bless and minister to neighbours. This has led to down-playing involvement in church-centred programs and increased efforts to serve community.

- babysitting provided to local refugee family
- a soccer coach investing more time in his team over several years, building relationship with players and parents.
- several families joining school Parent Advisory Committees
- Building Managers pursuing relationships with tenants and having opportunity to share gospel

This stands out to me because it is a more organic, relationship-driven approach but still connected to the church body. The focus is on bringing good to the city with the expectation that acting in love from

the gospel will give opportunity to declare the gospel. International relationships appear counter to our neighbourhood's culture.

- volunteer help for seniors who are not necessarily Christians
- refugees delivering pre-packaged lunch every week to seniors who are housebound
- the Bible says "Help" - God's character should be reflected in assisting those in need
- Sign of hope – light at the end of tunnel

Community outreach from St. Augustine's Anglican Church on Hudson in the Marpole area. They offer programs for seniors and the poor in the neighbourhood: community meals, friendship opportunities and food distribution. This stands out because it is one tangible sign of God blessing those in our society who are often overlooked, who no one cares for. This is good news to the poor (Luke 4 Isaiah 61) It creates community for many who are isolated. Demonstrates God's love and grace to the underprivileged. It is a Christian effort by an Anglican church.

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?

- One common brokenness I see is that a Christian is hurt by his own mistakes, mostly sexual matters, even though he has tried to be upright in the biblical standards.
- Prosperity and wealth goals in themselves. Seeking security without needing God. Loving the world. The god of this world has blinded them.
- Isolation / loneliness, non-cohesion, neighbours not knowing each other. Different ethnic heritage, lack of centre/common places. Lack of support when marriage gets in trouble.
- Social isolationism: Distrust. Pursuit of independence as a worthy goal. Loss of 'neighbour', erosion of neighbourhood/community. Detachment -> loss of identity.
- Disordered love – self promotion -> meeting my needs – pleasure, finances, social, material things
- Lack of outreach by local churches – we are not as proactive as the Mormon or Jehovah's Witnesses, although there is one church that sporadically does street corner ministry at 49th and Victoria
- Lack of friendships or uniformity in friendship (we only make friends with people who look like us). Challenge in churches. Little understanding of different cultures and narratives.
- Godlessness. Although students spend much of their time asking questions, none of this involved the ultimate question of existence and purpose. Unseen hole in the soul, no family, no elders to bring wisdom or knowledge.
- Isolation – busyness of life makes it hard for people to take time to know their neighbours and spend time with others outside of superficial interactions. Children are over-programmed and adults are trying to pay mortgages. Lack of leisure or sabbatical time. Fear of others / Xenophobia due to culture/language differences. Cocooning creates a form of stability & security that can be isolating. This leads to loneliness and self-focus.

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."

- Attitude toward enslavement by money & time, harried schedules, trying to fit in more. Attempting to be fulfilled – especially ensuring our children are fulfilled. Preoccupation with money, burdens of debt, feeling enslaved by work, fearful about provision
- Busyness – filling lives to maximum so nothing is leftover.
- Wealth – acquisition, meeting a certain standard or image of home → economic injustice
- Separation – everyone going their separate ways, not wanting to have anything to do with the others around.
- Racial resentment – being polite is one thing, being willing to divide on racial/cultural lines and to blame “the other” for problems (eg: housing costs widely attributed to foreign ownership)
- Image – putting on a mask, playing a part, competition with others in terms of family, children, personal achievement.
- wealth and the lust for more
- stability, fear of danger
- ethnicity, fear of other cultures, refugees
- power/control – to always be in control
- Olympic Village – The idolatry of wealth & power. The time and effort it takes to pursue these sucks away life from individuals & families. It cuts into people’s empathy & availability to care for those in need. It accentuates the divisions between people. They attach themselves to things & titles instead of others.
- Self-reliance. We’re in a well-educated neighbourhood where people want to look competent and like they have it all together. Being vulnerable is often seen as dangerous and there is fear of being taken advantage of. Self-reliance leads to a sense of loneliness and separation = me-focused rather than other-focused
- Fear of being transparent & vulnerable is causing loneliness, lack of trust and a sense of hopelessness. The enemy is working to isolate and separate. Christians are thus preventing the building of loving & caring groups of believers and [causing] a slow loss of faith.
- FEAR OF MAN: We minister in the shadow of UBC, in one of the highest educated postal codes in Canada - knowledge, technique, power. Self-determined, even self-possessed. “I know what’s best for me.” “No one tells me what’s right or wrong.” (The exact wrong answer to Genesis 3.) This leads to the rule of the fittest, strongest, smartest. A fear-filled competition to not fall behind, make a mistake, or show weakness in any way. Leads to isolation & loss of community.
- Independence, self-sufficiency, self-reliance, busyness
- Idols – Comfort, Greed, privacy, distrust, self-centeredness, courteous ambivalence, wealth and isolation, gentrification
- Hedonism – we have it all.
- Complacency – since we have it all, we don’t need God.
- Prosperous, materialistic needs. Obstructing the way to the blessing of being poor in spirit.
- Preoccupation with money, burdens of doubt, feeling enslaved by work, fearful about provision.
- Materialism seems to be the fundamental character of evil in our neighbourhood. The desire for vast wealth and all that entails, or growing up with material wealth in a way that leads to superficial, earthly satisfaction and spiritual indifference.

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 house prices leading to families moving to suburbs, loss of children/young people, lots of empty houses owned by foreign investors. For our congregation it means young families stay with the church at great financial cost. No hope of buying, high rent. This leads to overall low margins in people’s lives as time gets consumed by work and financial issues – especially among younger singles and families.

- Economic and land ownership inequality. Our neighbourhood has two extremes of that experience: very wealthy homeowners in Dunbar, and the First Nations (Musqueam) experience of land being usurped. The economic inequality caused by those extremes is felt as well. And as economic and home/land ownership inequality increases, social stratification increases, lessening the possibility of economic diversity within communities.
- Housing availability, pricing and development priorities. Even on the wealthy westside, families are being squeezed out of residential markets. Investors and buyers are often not interested in building community. New building projects are mostly high end – claims of increased housing availability [aren't leading to homes] affordable even to the middle class. Increased divide between owners/renters, wealthy/poor.
- Greed – sense of needing to get as much as possible, fear of falling behind. I need to own more, experience more pleasure, achieve more, and my kids have to outperform their competitors as well. This fear and insecurity leads to a well-camouflaged sense of “me first”. It's all about me, and if others suffer, well, I'm sorry but I can't help that. I was born here and I need to catch up. Leads to meaninglessness and isolation/loneliness. I'm thinking that the origins of this greed-in-abundance mentality might pre-date European contact.
- Unaffordable housing, house flipping, absentee owners, decreasing rental market
- Pressure created by rising property values. Owners are getting wealthy, self-satisfied, but many young renters are feeling marginalized and left out as ownership moves further beyond reach. Feels like a wedge dividing people.
- Disparity between wealthy and poor. First Nations people.
- Inhospitability – development for money without consideration for the greater good of the city. No affordable housing, families are forced out of city, growing poverty, financial pressures lead to marital impact. The limited protection given by the City against market forces.
- The handling of real estate – we live on the unceded territory of the Musqueam First Nation. Commercial and civic powers are benefitting from skyrocketing real estate prices and have no reason to curb this trend, due to profits and taxes. People with limited means are driven from the neighbourhood. Some are forced from the area or must downsize or move from ownership to tenancy. Growing divide between have/have-nots. This affects those in and out of the church – it's a universal issue.
- poverty: homelessness + addiction; lack of affordable housing; separation of the community on the basis of culture, language, and understanding the diversity of values
- spiritual poverty: fear of sharing the Gospel in word and deed
- unaffordable housing
- high speed, heavy traffic generated by a private school & shortcut to university

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

- The greatest wound is the family baggage from their dysfunctional families. Many young adults grew up with one parent or had a traumatized upbringing.
- Literally God-Less-Ness. Although students spend much of their time asking questions and seeking answers, none of this involves the ultimate questions of existence and purpose. Unseen hole in the soul. No family, few societal transcendent visions. No elders to bring wisdom alongside knowledge
- Death of community spirit; thinning out of neighbourly relations, isolation, loneliness
- Loneliness/isolation, people who live right next to each other have never had a conversation. They are isolated in their mini-bubble and separated from community
- Distrust due to non-acceptance
- They don't know that their wounds can be healed by the wound of Christ.
- Social isolation/loneliness: Dunbar is an affluent community; rising cost of housing has driven away young families and singles; privacy vs vulnerability, lack of shared needs

- Olympic Village – loneliness. Authentic, substantial relationships seem to be lacking. Knowing others and being known doesn't occur to the depth that we need as humans. This disconnect is harmful spiritually, emotionally, psychologically and physically. Olympic Village is a place where people come from the outside to hang out, and those who live there cocoon themselves after work.
- There is an epidemic of people starved for meaningful relationships and that includes church attendees.
- lack of a centre, common places
- lack of support when marriages get in trouble