

BLESSING THE CITY TOGETHER

next steps from the 2016 Vancouver City Summit

This document summarizes priorities for shared mission that were identified by senior clergy and Christian non-profit executives during The Vancouver City Summit held November 24-25, 2016, at Glad Tidings Church.

The Summit capped a ten-month Consultation process to discern answers to three questions: What is God doing in our neighbourhoods and ministries – where do we see signs of hope and deep flourishing? What are the primary spiritual wounds, idols, and social injustices in the city? How is the Holy Spirit prompting us to encourage, learn from, and cooperate with each other as well as with people of good will so that we become catalysts for shalom here?

The first day and a half of the Summit showcased answers to the first two questions that had been gathered previously through focus groups, interviews, and research. This information and perspective was offered through plenary speakers, panel discussion among civic leaders, brief presentations from innovative practitioners, and site tours of model ministries.

The final afternoon was given over to small group sessions that engaged the Consultation's third question. Punctuated with periods of silent prayer, each group deliberated on the following: *From the perspective of the Church as a whole in Vancouver, how can we most bless the city given what you know about your own ministry context and what we've heard the last two days? What are the major barriers to the Church blessing the city in these ways?*

Here are key themes that emerged from these group discussions.

1. **Be present, create space for belonging.** Taking a cue from the Incarnation, we need to prioritize spending unhurried, non-programmed time with our neighbours - truly entering as individuals and institutions into neighbourhood life. Jesus is already present and active there. So we can expect abundant fruit if we practice radical hospitality in our personal lives and creatively use our church properties (and houses) as "third places" where strangers of every description can together forge community.
2. **Listen & dialogue.** Being truly present to our neighbours requires us to re-cultivate the art of patient listening without agenda. It starts with prayer: setting aside more time to listen to God and be shaped by our listening (i.e., the *Shema* "Hear, O Israel, the Lord your God..."). Shalom takes time because it's built on trust between disparate people. Listening implies asking good questions to further mutual understanding that yields reconciliation. We can be peacemakers and change-agents by convening dialogue.
3. **Sabbath.** This was expressed mostly in negative terms. The frenzied pace of the city-at-large infects the Church. Neither pastors nor parishioners have enough margin, so an attitude of survival prevails. Strain on calendars, talent pools, money, and facilities fuels a sense of scarcity and competition, as well as risk aversion. Pastors wear too many hats but often don't know what or when to "let go." Change has to start with leaders modeling that all time belongs to God, teaching congregants to become contemplative and do less programming. Idolatry of "the working years" and cost-of-living pressure prevent effective discipleship, while making that fact hard to talk about.
4. **Discipleship.** We need to revolutionize our idea of discipleship and how to go about it. People are best disciplined through mission: growing through going. We should train them to be missionaries in our host culture, first using the Eucharist as archetype of social connection, then journeying with people so they find how their daily work (and "retirement") life can testify to God's creative/restorative purposes. Leaders and parishioners alike need to commit to the long term, adopting a kind of vow of stability.

5. **Missional unity.** “More connections” are the starting point for blessing our metro region well. Our unity in Christ for the sake of Christ’s mission would itself be powerful testimony, but would also give us freedom to leverage our diverse gifts across traditions and ethnicities. Adopting “a centred set instead of a bounded set approach” would let us acknowledge differences whilst coming alongside others of good will and earning our right to be heard. The survival mentality noted above, along with arrogance, competitiveness, tribalism, and plain bad theology (around ecumenics) keep us apart. Parachurch organizations (large ones, especially) execute power plays on congregations, instead of partnering with them. Missional unity requires someone tasked to facilitate it: if it’s nobody’s job, it doesn’t get done.

6. **Frameworks and strategies.** As always, our centering purpose is to carry out the Great Commandment and Great Commission, to communicate Christ through deed and word. Asset Based Community Development focuses us on what is working and the strengths/gifts each person and group possesses. It also pushes us toward systemic justice, prompting us to “commit acts of community, not charity.” We must continue taking inventory of the Church’s assets, so that we can acknowledge what we’re already doing to bless the city, avoid unnecessary duplication, share expertise, and leverage resources. With *shalom* as our definition of flourishing, we can figure out how to track the outcomes of our efforts and to support the City’s *Healthy City for All Strategy*. Because of the size and complexity of the city, we need to convene people in their local settings, while simultaneously establishing a city-wide platform for engagement. For the same reason, we must increase the ethnic diversity at tables such as this Summit, and confess our own brokenness and unwillingness to wrestle through conflict. We must adopt a posture of humble service toward each other and especially toward those outside the Church.

NEXT STEPS COMMISSIONED IN FINAL SESSION OF THE SUMMIT

In the final 90 minutes of the Summit, each small group taped their flipchart notes onto a wall for everyone to read. Then moderated discussion involving all attendees yielded consensus next steps:

- Define our desired outcomes for transformation: e.g. Glenn Smith’s indicators of a transformed Montreal; identify the “prescription” for the municipal Healthy City Strategy.
- Plot the Consultation’s directory of congregational community service programs and parachurch organizations onto the Healthy City diagram
- Circulate a list of all the congregations and ministries who came to the Summit.
- Let Jonathan or Flyn know your passion, so they can connect us.
- Note well the notion from Frederick Buechner that the Church’s calling is where its greatest passion overlaps with the city’s greatest need.
- Find more resource/strategy experts and materials.
- Congregations could routinely acknowledge near the start of worship time that we are on unceded traditional territory of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh nations
- Reserve more intentional time for collective prayer of discernment.
- How do we listen to the Holy Spirit together without defaulting to simple majority vote, with true spiritual discernment?
- Convene missional roundtables in neighbourhoods.
- Just go and talk/listen with neighbours and stakeholders.
- Image from group prayer: Jesus sitting on the Lower Mainland and gesturing “come, let’s sit together” – a posture of being present and blessing, not doing or controlling
- Commission CityGate Leadership Forum to help pilot “One City, One Sermon” around the theme of biblical hospitality, on June 11, 2017. Since the general idea was suggested by Councilor Andrea Reimer, have her reach out to other faith communities to invite them.
- Pastors commit to an hour’s visit with at least 3 pastors nearby, before the “One City, One Sermon” date.

Appendix. Transcript and Collation of Friday Afternoon Breakout Session Notes

Flipchart notes from each of the break out groups were transcribed and then collated into the following thematic categories. Elements in black font come from the first session (“How can the church as a whole best bless the city”). Elements in orange font come from the second session (“What are the barriers to blessing the city in those ways”). Elements in italics were underscored or otherwise marked for emphasis on the flipcharts.

BE PRESENT, CREATE SPACE FOR BELONGING

- Be present, *sit* with the city and with Jesus in the city.
- *Being present*
- 3 words come to mind: faithful presence, creating space in the hurried environment, relationships
- People don't feel welcome. In the hectic *space* it's hard to be safe, be myself; it's tough to find a *place* for this. Peaceful “third spaces” are rare, especially for the marginal. Every church can find a way to create such space/place.
- CORE NEED: to be known. The Church has Christ and community to offer.
- Practice radical hospitality in the face of radical inhospitality.
- Risk presence: just *be* among the people. Model authentic community. Help people belong. Create space for belonging, through meals and housing.
- Steward *place*: be a visible witness through hospitality; create space out of empty bedrooms and empty churches
- How can we better use our spaces? How does our church building become a third space or public space? E.g. community garden, space for neighbourhood events
- Get to know your actual neighbours, and pay attention to God working beyond the church.
- Pay attention to ‘parish’ context.
- Look for where Christ is most present.
- Welcoming into community based on Christ's power: we are not just another social agency. We're Christians loving, something unique. This leads to modeling (for example) sustainable families, journeying together
- Create intentional “*space*” for *hospitality*
- Creative responses to needs for housing and *places of welcome*
- Can we go out and build relationships instead of focusing on attractional models?
- Respond to loneliness and isolation surfaced by the Vancouver Foundation's 2011 *Vital Signs* study – more acute than homelessness?

LISTEN & DIALOGUE

- PRAY FOR THE CITY!
- *Shema*: “Hear, O Israel” – willingness to be shaped by our listening
- Do more listening to God
- Recultivate the art of listening
- Ask questions and listen.
- Listen. Get to know the neighbourhood. Without an agenda. Be a student. Be attentive. Understand.
- Really get to know your neighbours.
- *Engage with local MLAs*

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- International students, the poor, Christian young people – are asking hard questions
- Listen and be gentle.
- Be peacemakers.
- More directed/intentional conversation
- *Hold targeted forums*
- Continue to create space to foster *dialogue and exchange* for reconciliation – *stories*, not ideology – in the manner of Parker House, because it's hard to do this in an institutional setting
- Offer training in how to tell your story and listen to others' stories
- How do we help people find God in their story?
- Create better dialogue between government, public sector organizations, and churches.
- Church as change-agent by bringing very different people together just to talk and listen
- Making ourselves available to be agents of reconciliation and mediation
- Listen: “shalom takes time” – how can we as churches listen to one another, to our parishioners, our communities and thereby build trust?
- How do we make space and time to *listen*, engage, retreat, “be”?

SABBATH

- *Slow down* to see what God is doing.
- Do less ... programming, so as to have margin
- Teach our congregations to be contemplative, to practice spiritual disciplines.
- *Whatever is to happen must start with me.* I need to be the change I want to see.
- Is all “time” God’s?
- *lack of Sabbath: it does take “work”*
- *The same hectic pace of the city-at-large infects the Church. Need to incorporate ways to connect to the wellspring in the midst of ministry, as ministry. To open up liminal moments in order to re-centre ourselves – Sabbath*
- *Busyness = not just activity but not having space for contemplation*
- *Busyness is robbing us of prayer, clarity, space, focus, relationship, release, intimacy with Christ*
- *It’s difficult in a Chinese church to slow down. This is always a topic for our leadership and we don’t know what to do about it. We’ve no margin to try new stuff or be entrepreneurial or experimental.*
- *Chasing the wind: busy-ness*
- *Wearing many hats, sitting on many committees*
- *Clergy are busy with administration (especially in Roman Catholic parishes)*
- *Not knowing what or when to “let go”*
- *Surviving = hard to look outside of ourselves*
- *Scarcity mentality: lack of resources; fear of failure or future burden We’re not (yet) learning from others: silos, scarcity mentality, we see it adding responsibility rather than lightening the load*
- *Scarcity or survivalist mindset: focusing on numbers, facilities, resources; preoccupied with the question “How do we keep things afloat?”*
- *Idolatry of the working years and whatever that stands for (why are we not praying? Busy-ness is the symptom, not the disease)*
- *Parishioners are busy with work and church, no room for life or time for asking if we know what a disciple is. But lack of margin and problems of discipleship are rarely discussed communally*

DISCIPLESHIP

- Revolutionize the idea of discipleship and how to do it
- Disciple through mission: growing through going
- Train our people to be local missionaries as the hands and feet of Christ.
- Train 'missionaries' around the table: food as a vehicle to social connection; table is about communion, not just fuel.
- Work / journey with youth in ongoing vocational discernment and discipleship.
- Blessing people in their vocations, yes, even on Sundays. Community businesses, sports, other involvements
- Commit to the long term.
- Vow of stability [not relocating]
- Usual forms of discipleship aren't working
- Loss of spiritual directors within Evangelicalism
- Boomers feel entitled to retirement. Yet, for instance, international students love to hear their stories of life and faith. So we must get better at forming seniors for mission.
- We go to church; we do not live out as the church. There is a disconnect from people / place.
- "Christian social club" – "I'm in church to have *my* needs met and to feel good about myself." Busyness may be a cause. The mentality of 'the church should x/y/z for me'
- Idolatry of Individualism: pervasive culture war; culture is shaping us; the church is not shaping culture.
- Apathy: personal and corporate
- Unwillingness to "be shaped"

MISSIONAL UNITY

- More connections are the starting point for blessing the metro region well
 - Modeling connectedness with a purpose
 - Partnerships, collaborations, 'cooperative agreements,' partnering around assets not just needs (Asset Based Community Development)
 - Friendship between church leaders that goes beyond specific events
 - [annual] New Pastors Orientation
- Church unity: for the sake of *mission*. Church leaders and congregations *being* together.
- An 'uncommon unity' provides freedom [for action on] individual and corporate levels.
- We can bless with the gift of our knowledge in our unity and diversity (ecumenism).
- Get more connected ecumenically
- Grow in relationship to other church communities.
- Engage and build relationship with non-White churches
- Use the notion of 'centred set instead of bounded set' as a path to finding voice
- Be honest about differences, and then move on.
- *We need to get over ourselves.*
- Don't protect
- Choose to act regardless of affinity
- Come together out of our strengths instead of weaknesses, because we all bring different gifts to the table.
- Work together as faith communities, coordinated and partner-oriented rather than competitively.
- Collaborate in ministry (and life) with Christian and non-Christian ministry.

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- Henry Blackaby: “See where God is at work and join Him there.”
- Join in: partner with what is already happening.
- Come alongside of city initiatives [community-based and municipal], don’t start your own. Volunteer. Ask the City what they want. They’re asking us to *be interested in them*, to listen. Saying, “don’t confront us; just talk with us, join in.” We can **have a voice, if we earn it through being in relationship**, and if [as Andrea Reimer said] we stop doing acts of charity and start doing acts of community.
- Mentality: recognizing that we bring “God with us” wherever we go
- it’s difficult to show the value of unity and interconnectedness
- need to unite and mobilize in order to release the whole church to organize and act
- ‘lack of unity’
- lack of connections and partnerships between churches
- exclusivity: tribal mentality is overly divisive
- broken relationship among churches, and between the city and church
- bad theology causes deep suspicion of partnering outside our tribe: we don’t trust each other and don’t understand each other’s gifting, that one size doesn’t fit all
- all boils down to trusting enough in God, and to the importance of relationship when being asked to get involved or to let outsiders into congregational activities
- arrogance toward others in the Church
- self-preservation particularly in local churches or sectarian interests
- churches compete with each other
- power plays by parachurch organizations upon congregations
- inconsistent church witness [because we’re] fragmented; “church” needs translating [for those outside it]
- “If it’s nobody’s job, it doesn’t get done.” [i.e., someone must be tasked with facilitating missional unity]

FRAMEWORKS & STRATEGIES

- Gather around the *Gospel*. Proclamation and witness. Resiliency. Hold the gospel up to others.
- Gospel intentionality
- Communicate Christ through word and deed.
- How do we prioritize the Great Commandment and Great Commission?
- Presenting and sharing the “new creation” / church that lives differently: visibly the people of God living our faith “out loud”
- Minding our *posture of service*, not dominance
- Community development that takes into view the local, communal, and systemic levels
- Focus on Asset Based Community Development
- Asset-based ministry: identify our strengths, join in work God is already doing, using what God has already gifted us with
- My Chinese congregation can raise a tremendous amount of money to respond immediately to a large crisis (e.g. hurricane damage), so there is massive generosity for “charity”
- Have the whole congregation take the Welfare Food Challenge to do as Andrea Reimer suggested, “commit acts of community, not charity”
- Seek shalom by attending to what is *missing* and what is *broken*.
- How can we support the [municipal] *Healthy City for All Strategy*?
- Churches’ greatest passions [drawn images of increasing levels of overlap moving from healthy communities to healthy environments to healthy people]

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- Prioritize a city platform for engagement
- The city is too big – need a parish inventory, assessment, and solutions.
- Don't duplicate. Share resources.
- acknowledge the work the Church already does to bless:
 - e.g, Cardus's Halo Project that traces the social good of churches in their neighbourhoods/city;
 - an asset inventory of the Church in Vancouver
- help that would be useful:
 - better hashtags
 - place for stories, connections, learning from others
 - stories of what God is doing in particular neighbourhoods
 - create a focus within MissionsFest
 - coordinate a "cultural crawl" related to food: cohort touring each other's programs; vulnerability, openness, learning; connected to [?] on issues
- Irrelevance: do we see ourselves as relevant? Does the city and community feel our value?
- The church's view of "success" – how is it measured?
- Lack of willingness to wrestle through conflict
- Not able to deal with our own brokenness, especially we leaders
- Lack of repentance within, leading to lack of witness without
- "Crappy theology" [of mission]
- Narrow or mis-understanding of God's broad vision of redemption
- Lack of diversity at the table: First Nations, ethnic churches, seminaries
- Seminary training lacks practical education
- Self-limiting mindset: there is an assumed need to conform to external expectations of political correctness
- Failing to recognize the value of Christ living in us
- Faithlessness articulated as the word "impossible" (Councilor Andrea Reimer)

ONE CITY, ONE SERMON

- Andrea Reimer's request that one Sunday each year we all preach on a single subject – "One City, One Sermon" modeled after the "One City, One Book" initiative
- *Andrea Reimer's suggested "One City, One Sermon"*
- "One City, One Sermon" + teaching theology of the city and how to move from charity to community
- "One City, One Sermon"; "Goliaths" = combatted by facilitating conversation
 - competitiveness
 - professionalized clergy
 - cultural mistrust
 - transience / instability
 - fear
 - colonialism
 - sins of our fathers
 - materialism
 - different worldviews
 - impact of Charles Taylor's third type of secularism
 - last two points combine to create disorientation
 - divisions of language and culture
 - a scarcity mindset

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- “left behind” / escape theology
- “it’s too expensive” with respect to money and time
- our differences rule the day
- intellectualism
- objectifying the city

MISCELLANEOUS SPECIFIC ISSUES

- Solutions [to at least] parts of the housing issue; mental illness; vote
- Address the alienation of our affluence.
- Respond to child poverty? It’s systemic levels and relation to homelessness in future.
- Sustainability: creation care as public witness
- *Stand against marginalization and bigotry*, e. g. toward Muslims
- Advocate together *with* the poor for policy change regarding sustainable economics and a Guaranteed Livable Income.
- Authentic engagement with issues of mental health
- Acknowledge that we view and treat Aboriginals and women with scorn and violence.
- All churches acknowledge they’re on [unceded Indigenous] territory.
- Invest in student (university/college) ministry.
- Engage, serve, support the Punjabi community [largest language group in Metro Vancouver]
- There are no barriers in Christ, but there are challenges that need to be named.
- Housing
- Hypocrisy
- Anti-Christian attitudes
- Hyper-individuality
- Immunity that comes with hyper-individualism
- Fear
- Confusion / pressure around sexual ethics
- Fear of the Other: discrimination, xenophobia, sexism
- NIMBYism
- Gentrification and the cost of housing
- Transiency and the lack of permanence, consistency, dependability
- Transformation and degradation of the public square: internet and public forums
- People aren’t looking for friends
- Inattentiveness to the needs of others
- Ignorance and denial of social, economic, ethnic and gender inequalities
- City regulations and bylaws as well as other potential legal obstacles