



Do you remember the terrible forest fires that burned out of control in British Columbia during the summer of 2003? I remember watching the fires on TV as they moved so close to Kelowna and right to the very outskirts of Kamloops, swallowing up other communities in its path. As I watched the TV, for me, it was as if this was the only fire happening in the world. But, did you know that there were similar fires burning in Colorado and other places in North America at the same time? Did you know that in 2002/03, satellites recorded over a million fires around the globe that year? Places of light and heat, independent of one another, had ignited because the conditions were just right. Few people who were concentrating on the blaze in British Columbia realized that at the very same time an average of over 2700 fires were ablaze in forests and grasslands elsewhere on Earth. It is only from the perspective of space and time that patterns of such magnitude and significance can be seen.

In the same way, there has been a new fire that has been igniting around the globe in churches, one at a time; it is a subtle shift in how the church sees its call. It is happening on 2 levels. The first is missions, an understanding that it is not enough to just send money and missionaries around the world. Instead, we are seeing so many people feeling a call to go on short-term missions and personally get involved in touching the world with their own hands. Twenty years ago, there were only a few individuals who went on short-term trips. From our church last year this fire was ignited in over 80 people lives. Last week we heard from another 17 youth reporting on their trip to an orphanage in Mexico to work.

The second fire that is happening is that, independent of each other, churches are increasingly convinced that their effectiveness is not just measured by what happens inside the church but rather by the impact the people of the church have on their communities. There is this new outward look that is happening one church at a time. The fantastic thing is that while we may not have realized it, this is part of a growing global movement. Across the world and finally across North America we are seeing churches ask how they can be better salt and light in and for their communities. We are seeing a shift from being Internally focused churches to more Externally focused churches.

For some of you who are a little older and were key players in establishing the Mustard Seed ministry many years ago, it must be exciting to see this new wave of involvement and passion in ministries like the Seed, Jesus Loves You Society, Inn from the Cold, etc. But it is more than that. Let me get personal here. I am finding that now the building is done, God is laying on my heart, (as well as many of your hearts,) this new and very strong call to ask how can we make an impact, meet needs and touch the hearts of people who live in our community and in our city. The reason for this series is that God has been nudging me with a call to find out exactly what I am called to do and what we, as a church, are called to do to in caring for those around this church and in the communities we, the people of Brentview, are living in.

What excites me is that, just like with the case of the fires, if you take a larger view, you will find out that what God is doing in so many of our hearts. He seems to be doing it across the globe as well. He is lighting fires in churches and people to be Externally focused churches. While there is something transcendent about worshipping together and praying together, we seem to be hearing again for the first time that old

call from Isaiah 1:13 - 17 that we need to, *“seek justice, encouraged the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless and plead the case of the widow.”*

We have been talking for the last 3 weeks that: (i) we are called to love our neighbour, period and we are called to be their friend, no strings attached. (ii) We know that one day we will wing our way heavenward we need to ready when others asks or God nudges us to tell them the Good News about Jesus, which will have an affect on their lives in the here and now, as well as in eternity. So, make room for a neighbour at your Super Bowl party, or invite them to join you for the walk you take, or the coffee break you take at work this week. Be a friend.

Now I want to open the circle a little larger. I believe that just as God, by design, places us next to our neighbours and specific individuals. I believe He places us in our communities on purpose as well. This placement is as true of us as a church as for you as an individual.

I. Where We Are Placed As a Church

In 1962, a group of people felt called of God to plant a church on the prairies in the Brentwood area, 4 years before the University of Calgary was founded, believing that their destiny was to make an eternal difference in lives of people in this area. Now, 47 years later, we have people in our congregation who live in a number of different communities in Calgary. This past summer a member of our congregation, Michael Akinpelu, has helped us do a demographic survey of 3 areas around the church to help us begin to answer the how can we care for those in the community in which God has placed us. Michael poured through data we purchased from the city and then checked his results with some door to door surveys. I want to give you just a little taste of what he found out.

1. Facts Found out

(i) Location: We are situated in what is called the Triwood Community. This is made up of 3 areas:

Charleswood, population of 3,503

Collingwood, population of 2,325

Brentwood, population 6,255

(ii) Age Distribution

Charleswood:

>45-54, 24%

55-64, 12%

65-74, 11%

74+, 13%

45+, 59%

Collingwood:

45-74+, 59%

Brentwood:

25-44, 25%

65-75+, 24%

(iii) Family:

Charleswood:

Married, 55%

Common Law, 2-1/2 % (smaller % than in the rest of the city)

Separated, 2%

Widowed, 3%

Divorced, 8% (Collingwood highest divorced group)

Single parents?

Children at home: age 6 – 14, 38% (2001); age 15-17, 9%, age 18 -24, 23%

(iv) Education

College/ University, 60% (higher city average)

Age 15 – 24 School Attendance: Full Time, 53%; Part Time, 8%

(v) Diversity

Charleswood has great growth of Internationals in the 1970's-80's and then picks up in mid-1990's

Countries represented:

UK, 17%

China 22%

Hong Kong 7%

USA, 8%

Germany, 15%

China, 18%

Brentwood, from 1991 – present, a growing Immigrant population

(vi) Homes in Brentwood are selling for an average of \$471,671 and in Charleswood, \$533,042. Both are above the Calgary average.

2. Comments

A. WHY is this so important?

Simple. Before you can love your neighbour you need to know a little about them. Acts 17:16, 21 – 23, ¹⁶*While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols. ²¹(All the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas.) ²²Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: "Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. ²³For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you."*

As Paul walked the streets of Athens he was mentally observing the people of the city. He was noticing their religious passions, attitudes and then he found a key through which he could care for them and a way of sharing Jesus in a way they would grasp.

If you want to do the same in the community you are living in, look at what kind of toys are on people's front lawn (i.e. basketball hoop, splash pool, etc); go shopping at your local grocery store and see who is there and what is on the shelf (i.e. Country Hills Superstore is like the United Nations, there are people and foods from around the world); hang out at a soccer field or a community meeting and see who is there and

what are their major concerns. From these observations you will get a flavour of who is in your community.

B. WHAT have we learned?

(i) Our survey tells us that we need to gather a little more information. For example, what percentage of the homes are rental versus single family homes? What percentage of the homes are single parents with children? What are the religious backgrounds of our neighbours? Etc.

(ii) It tells us that the average person in Triwood area would be between the ages of 40 and 55, the second largest group are over 65 (25%) and at least 12% of those are over 75. A Realtor looks at this data and concludes that in the next few years the neighbourhood will have an arrival of new people moving in. We need to be asking what do we need to do to prepare for the new folk who will be moving into our neighbourhood and as they move in how can we help them find faith through our ministries, (i.e. as a church should we plan our own welcome pamphlet and gift when we see a for sold sign appear.)

(iii) It tells us that most people in the neighbourhood are highly educated and almost 30% would be either in school or connected with the higher education in some way.

(iv) It tells us that it is a harder area for young couples to afford to move into these areas and that most of our young families and younger professionals are driving a distance to come to church.

(v) It tells us that we are still having an influx of Internationals moving into our area (especially Brentwood area.) Almost 30% are of Chinese background, followed by Americans (18%) and then Germans. This means that our ministry here must continue to have a strong International and Student component to it. It means that God trusts us enough that He has orchestrated the movement of Internationals from around the world so we could care for them and introduces them to Jesus. As well, because 30% of the area has people over the age of 65, it must be a place where they can experience worship in a way that is meaningful to them and develop friendships which will draw them into a relationship with Jesus.

(vi) It tells us that Brentview draws well educated people, (most through higher education but some through simply working very hard in their career to educate themselves in their field,) who are articulate, hard working people who are leaders and who have a larger view of the world than just Calgary and a more complex view of faith and life.

Let me add one simple note: While this is the community in which our church has been planted by God, it is not the only community which our church touches. When you came in this morning you saw a city map in the foyer where we had begun to place pins to mark where many of you live. I hope before the service and afterwards you check to see if your residence was marked there. If it wasn't, add your pin to the map.

As part of Brentview, you need to know that we come from over 52 different communities in Calgary; however, I would say that most of our people come from 16 different communities in NW Calgary. I believe your community needs to be part of our

ministry where we, through you, make a difference in your community. This means that every Sunday as I say, "Go and make a difference in your world," we have the potential to have a positive, Godly affect on a huge part of our city. The key is whether you and I believe that our lives can make a difference in our area of the city.

A while ago, I met the janitor of the Senator Patrick Burns School, who lives across from the school. His comments were so positive as to how we had carried ourselves in the school and how we had carried ourselves with class in the neighbourhood. That meant that our light shone from the school into the neighbourhood around the school.

II. What We Can Bring to the Communities We Live In

1. Don't forget the potential you have for good and for joy.

At the back of a church, I once read a thing that said, "*Small things done with great love will change the world.*" Do you remember Jesus' first miracle in John 2? He didn't raise someone from the dead. He didn't feed multitudes or heal someone's debilitating illness. He simply turned water into wine. By His presence there He made the wedding reception a success by caring for the hosts of the party. His presence was a blessing to the wedding party and all that were there. In short, everyone was glad that Jesus showed up. Then it added this simple comment at the end of the story, "*He thus revealed His glory.*" In other words, they saw the presence of God in Him by the way He had cared for them and "*his disciples put their faith in Him.*" He was there and graciously cared for them which prompted a spiritual change in their lives.

If you are a coach on a Community league soccer team or on the community board or dropping off a caring note to a teacher, you can add life-changing joy to others. Let me give you a strange example. The other day I received a frantic call to help at a Bingo (it is how my son, Mark's marching band raises money.) The Bingo is on a Reserve and therefore smoking is allowed, (it took me 2 days to be able to smell again properly.) That night I added some joy to the life of the bingo caller, some little old ladies who were playing bingo and 2 of the volunteers. When they heard I was a minister and had made the evening a little more fun, they did some talking that got back to me. Now, I am not recommending this type of community care but I am saying that small things done with great love can bring joy and begin to cause change for good in the lives of others.

2. There is the Chance to make a Gracious Difference

In 150 A.D, a Christian monk wrote, "*As the soul is to the body so the Christian are the very soul of their community.*" Here's a thought, seek out a few Christians in your community and begin to pray for those on the streets around you and together look for those who could use the gentle touch (God through you) in their lives. Just think of the testimony it would be if you joined with 5 - 8 other people from different churches (who live in your community) and together prayed about what your community needed, and then together became the hands and feet of Jesus. I know of some people who did this and now have started providing some mitts, hats and jackets for kids at their local school. A few people, who together, started sending good insoles to our soldiers in Afghanistan as a way of caring for them. I know of a church group who sends, serves cookies at PTA meetings at their school and doesn't even tell them what church they are from. We heard the other day of a church that set up feeding stations after the hurricane in Texas. I know that some of you have coached soccer teams or being a

'helping mom' at your child's school and simply graced your community with some of your time.

3. What we bring as a church and you bring as a Christian to your community right now is the recognition that God is still in Control.

With so many people afraid because of our current economy, it seems that every time you turn on the radio there is another layoff or gloom and doom forecast by someone. The result is that so many people are afraid today. Listen to what we believe:

- Psalm 91:2, *"I will say of the LORD, "He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust."*
- Psalm 112:7, *"He (speaking of us) will have no fear of bad news; his heart is steadfast, trusting in the LORD."*
- Isaiah 12:2, *"Surely God is my salvation; I will trust and not be afraid. The LORD, the LORD, is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation."*
- Isaiah 25:9, *"In that day they will say, "Surely this is our God; we trusted in him, and he saved us. This is the LORD, we trusted in him; let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation."*

We believe that God is still in control, we believe that He will be our support and constant friend no matter what we go through. We believe, like Meshach, Shadrach and Abednego, that even when we walk through the fire we will never be alone because Jesus walks with us (Daniel 3.) We believe that we have an anchor that keeps us through the storm. And as we believe that, and live that out, we can bring peace and hope into our communities. That is a great gift to bring into our community.



This is an advertisement in the Free Jive Weekly, a paper you would find in KFC or Wendy's in an around the church neighbourhoods. One of our congregation members owns this paper and places this ad for no charge to us. This is one way he is making an impact in our neighbourhood. It is fun to see how we can use our creativity to impact our community for Jesus.

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