

## URBAN MISSION METHODOLOGY

### The challenges of urban mission<sup>1</sup>

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In 1700, fewer than two percent of the world's population lived in urban places. Beijing and London were the only cities that had populations surpassing one million. By 1900 an estimated nine percent of the world's population was urban. London was then the only "super-city" on the globe. In 1950, 27 percent of the world's population lived in cities, and 73 percent of the world's people lived on the land.<sup>1</sup> By 1996 however, the world was growing by 86 million people a year, 73 million in cities alone and for the first time better than 50% of the world's population lived in cities. While the rural percentage of the world's population is declining, rural population is still growing in absolute numbers. The United Nations – which offers the most conservative growth estimate – projects that by 2025 over 60 percent of the world have estimated 8.3 billion people will live in urban areas?

According to the World Heritage Centre, by 2020 (just 14 years from now) the urban population of Asia will be around 2.5 billion, having doubled in 25 years. By then, more than half of the urban areas of the planet will be in Asia, and those urban areas alone will contain over one-third of the world's population. The same organization predicts that the cities of Asia will be growing twice as fast as cities in the rest of the world.

For all the challenges of urban areas - traffic, pollution, noise, high cost of living, crowded and often substandard living conditions, economic disparity, stress, psychological overload, long hours of commuting, violence – cities provide people in the developing world the best hope of education and income. So, people continue to be drawn to the city through migration and immigration.

As a heart pumps blood back and forth throughout a body, cities pump people around, on both a short-term and long-term basis. This makes it harder to develop stable churches in cities, but it creates the opportunity for global evangelisation as people find themselves relocated from one city to another.

Surely, God has a purpose in this.

Often, people who move to the city are not just moving away from something, but moving toward something as well. People move to the city wanting change, yearning for new things, expecting to be exposed to new ideas, to make a new start. Whether through migration or immigration, the socially dislocating experience of moving into a city tends to "loosen ties to local divinities," and opens doors for the gospel.

Given these facts and predictions, any discussion about the mission of the Church for the 21<sup>st</sup> century has to include urban strategy. Furthermore, because of the strategic nature of cities as centres of influence, business and finance, hubs of communication and

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transportation, education, entertainment, power and influence, to reach the world for Christ we will have to not merely include urban ministry but *prioritize* it. In fact, we cannot evangelize the world unless we reach the vast, growing and influential urban centres of the world. Developing strategies for reaching the world's urban areas for Christ cannot be based on the same methodologies or approaches that may or may not have worked elsewhere in other times. If we continue doing what we have done, we will end up with no more success than we presently are experiencing. When we talk about urbanization, we are talking about a context that is more crowded, more diverse, more dangerous and more intense. To pursue mission with the world's cities implies that we will have to re-discover, develop and make known theologies of urban mission that speak to people where they live and touch them where they hurt. That is, our strategies must be holistic and relevant. They must direct the gospel and transformational ministries toward the most urgent social and economic challenges.

This paper is an attempt to formulate a biblical and urban hermeneutic that will help urban ministry practitioners to take the categories of "place" and "space" more seriously, however challenging this might be.<sup>2</sup> We include an emphasis upon the lived experience of practitioners because this is at the heart of all urban reflection and action. It is our desire to illustrate what this looks like for urban ministry practice.<sup>3</sup> However, city/regions cannot be divorced from the philosophy of urbanism and globalization.

## **How do we pursue the transformation of our city/regions?**

Some people look at the spiritual and social plight of the city and ask, "Where is the Church?" and then rush to critique her lack of significant involvement in the complexities of the city. We would rather ask the question, "What will the Church look like?" in the midst of this plurality and the competing worldviews that a practitioner runs into on a weekly basis. There are two principal sources of information that inform contextual urban ministry and help us to understand what the Church will look like. We begin with a brief description of these two sources of information. In this paper we look towards the transformation of cities by God's Spirit by listening to the biblical text and paying close attention to our contexts.

The first source of information that informs urban ministry comes from our Christian traditions: our study of the Scriptures, Church history and Christian theology. However, pursuing the mission of God in our city/regions is always done in a specific social context. The practitioner and the congregation need to *listen and learn from* that context. (Padilla: 1979; Schreiter, 1986; Smith: 1996).

The process of interpreting the Text and the context (referred to as hermeneutics) becomes a true exchange between gospel and context. We come to the infallible message with an exegetical method to understand a biblical theology of place. We ask, "*What does God say through Scripture regarding this particular context?*" This includes place, problems, values and worldviews. This initial dialogue sets us out on a long process where the more we understand the context; the more fresh readings of the Bible will arise. Scripture illuminates life and life also illuminates Scripture! This dialogue must also include the practitioners' worldview and that of the community in which they base their initiatives.

Studying the Text and the context in this fashion represents a holistic enterprise in which the Holy Spirit guides the interpreters to a more complete reading and understanding of Scripture and a more complete understanding of the culture. There is an ongoing, mutual engagement of the essential components of the process. As they interact, they are mutually adjusted. In this way, we come to Scripture with relevant questions and perspectives. This results in a more attentive ear to the implications of the exegetical process and an ensuing theology that is more biblical and pertinent to the culture. As we move from the cultural context through our own evolving worldview to the Bible and back to the context, we adopt an increasingly relevant local reflection and more appropriate initiatives.

As we listen to Scripture and walk through our various situations in life, we are faced with a question. How can we hear and apply God's word in our cities and neighbourhoods?

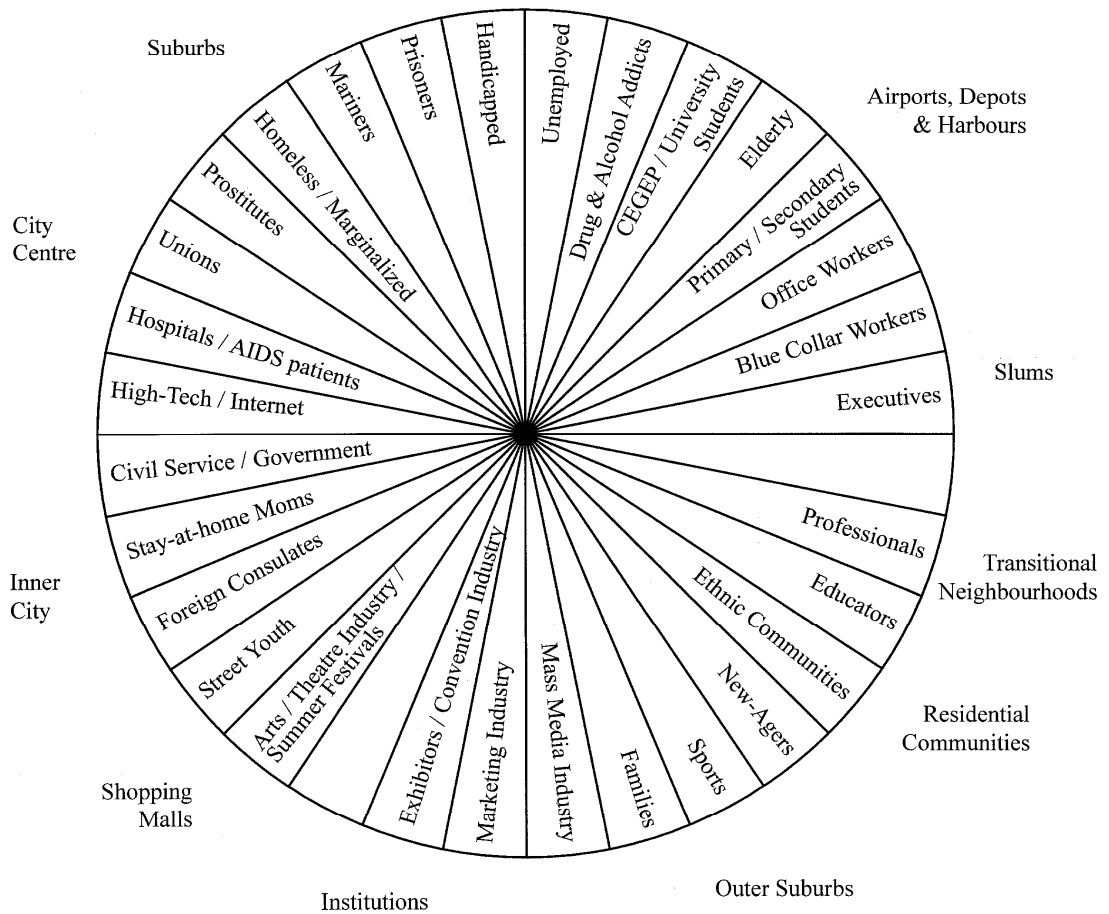
Many people do cultural studies and wrestle with (the sociology of) place. On a different track, other practitioners try to get their heads around the philosophies that make up the personality of our cities (sometimes referred to as a *horizon*). In this paper, we want to help the urban ministry practitioner put these two approaches together so that in examining the city as a place, we are also learning to look very closely at the worldviews that are reflected in the urban context. It is also obvious that urban practitioners need to be able to identify local worldviews in order to understand the spirituality in their particular context. A worldview is primarily a lens through which we understand life. Generally speaking, it includes a series of presuppositions that a group of people holds, consciously and unconsciously, about the basic make-up of the community, relationship, practices and objects of daily life, whether they are of great signification or of little importance. They are like the foundations of a house - vital but invisible. The make-up of a worldview is based on the interaction of one's ultimate beliefs and the global environment within which one lives. They deal with the perennial issues of life like religion and spirituality; yet contain answers to even simple questions such as whether we eat from individual plates or from a common bowl.

Worldviews are communicated through the channel of culture. We should be careful to not confuse culture and worldview, although they are in constant relationship with one another. Culture is foremost a network of meanings by which a particular social group is able to recognize itself through a common history and a way of life. This network of meanings is rooted in ideas (including beliefs, values, attitudes, rules of behaviour), rituals and material objects including symbols that become a source for identity such as the language we speak, the food we eat, the clothes we wear, the way we organize space. This network is not a formal and hierarchical structure. It is defined in modern society by constant change, mobility, reflection and ongoing experiences. This is in contrast to traditional societies where culture was transmitted directly from one generation to the next within the community structures. Modernity still transmits some aspects of culture like language and basic knowledge directly through the bias of the school system, but once this is done, the transmission of culture through friendship, peers and socio-professional status becomes more important.

Our understanding of social context raises several foundational questions. "How do we know a context when we see one?" "How big is a context?" "How long does it last?" "Who is in it and is out of it, and how do we know?" In reality, the complexity of

the city means we constantly ask these questions. The following representation inspired by the work of urban ministry practitioners in the city of Montreal, Canada seeks to take into account most of the factors that determine context.

**Organizational and Population Segments  
of an Urban World - Montréal**



09/2001

This hermeneutical approach to the *missio Dei* or *mission of God* in city/regions reaffirms “the scandal of particularity.” Urban mission is rooted in the very particular stories of the Bible and especially of the Good News of Jesus’ incarnation and the cosmic goal God has undertaken to re-inaugurate his reign through his death on the cross (Hall, 2003). This very notion has alienated a great number of modern theologians from the historic understanding of the Christian faith. There has been a tendency to question the uniqueness of God’s participation with creation through the history of Israel and in the person of Jesus Christ. Instead the concept of *mission* was broadened almost to the point that the Church was stripped of any responsibility for proclamation and service - the

Church was excluded from mission. This exclusion of the Church resulted in an argument that God was “working out His purposes in the midst of the world and its historical processes.” It was simply the Church’s responsibility to serve *missio Dei* by pointing to God “at work in world history and name Him there.”

This focus on God’s action in the world and its historical processes, to the exclusion of the Church’s mission of witness and service, was closely tied to what could be described as an exaggerated eschatology in which the fullness of God’s kingdom, of God’s *shalom*, was expected to be accomplished through the social and political motions of history. In order to avoid the severing of the *missio Dei* concept from the teachings of classical Christianity, and in an attempt to hold together the whole mission of God for the whole city, it will be important to hold the universal concept of the *missio Dei* together with the particular history of God’s plenary revelation in the person and work of Jesus Christ and read the story in our own unique contexts.

## **Contextualisation and Transformation**

Contextualisation literally means a “weaving together”. In this article it implies the interweaving of the Scriptural teaching about the city and the Church with a particular, present-day context. The very word focuses the attention on the role of the context in the theological enterprise. In a very real sense, then, all doctrinal reflection from the Scriptures is related in one way or another to the situation from which it is born, addressing the aspirations, the concerns, the priorities and the needs of the local group of Christians who are doing the reflection.

Contextualisation begins with an attempt to discern where God by his Spirit is at work in the context. It continues with a desire to demonstrate the gospel in word and deed and to establish groups of people who desire to follow Jesus in ways that make sense to people within their (cultural) context, presenting Christianity in such a way that it meets people’s deepest needs and penetrates their worldview, thus allowing them to follow Christ and remain within their culture.<sup>4</sup>

The task of contextualisation is the essence of urban reflection and action. The challenge is to remain faithful to the historic text of Scriptures while being mindful of today’s realities. An interpretative bridge is built between the Bible and the situation from which the biblical narrative sprang, to the concerns and the circumstances of the local group of Christians who are doing the reflection. The first step of the hermeneutic involves establishing what the Text meant at the time it was written: what it meant “then”. The second step involves creating the bridge to explore how the text is understood in meaningful terms for the interpreters today: what it could mean “now”. The final step is to determine the meaning and application for those who will receive the message in their particular circumstances, as present day interpreters become ambassadors of the Good News (Hiebert: 1987).

Contextualisation is not just for the one communicating, nor about the content that will be passed along. It is always concerned with what happens once we have communicated and about the ultimate impact of the message on the audience.

But for what purpose does the urban ministry practitioner pursue contextualisation? Why listen to both the present context and Christian tradition, including our study of the Scriptures, Church history and theology? Increasingly we hear

the use of the word *transformation* as a term that encompasses all that the Church does as followers of Jesus in God's mission in the city. But what does this mean? What does it entail?

The 1990 Population Fund Report on cities laid out interesting strategies for more livable urban areas. The Population Crisis Committee carried out the most complete study ever done. Data was gathered from the world's largest 100 metropolitan areas. Based on a 13-page questionnaire, the researchers wanted to determine the quality of life in these places. Ten parameters were chosen to determine the *livability* of these cities. Based on these criteria an urban living standard score was calculated. The parameters provide a glimpse of what *transformation* might include.<sup>5</sup>

Beatley and Manning offer this picture, "To foster a sense of place, communities must nurture built environment and settlement patterns that are uplifting, inspirational and memorable, and that engender a special feeling and attachment...a sustainable community where every effort is made to create and preserve places, rituals and events that foster greater attachment to the social fabric of the community." (1997:32)<sup>6</sup>

Inspired by John de Gruchy reflections<sup>7</sup>, I would suggest that a transformed place is that kind of city that pursues fundamental changes, a stable future and the sustaining and enhancing of all of life rooted in a vision bigger than mere urban politics.

If we accept that the Scriptures call the people of God to take all dimensions of life seriously, then we can take the necessary steps to a more holistic notion of transformation. A framework that points to the best of a human future for our city-regions can then be rooted in the reign of God.

In Jewish writings and tradition is the principle of *shalom*. It represents harmony, complementarity, and establishment of relationships at the interpersonal, ethnic, and even global levels. Psalm 85:11 announces a surprising event: "*Justice and peace will embrace.*" However, a good number of our contemporaries see no problem with peace without justice. People looking for this type of peace muzzle the victims of injustice because they trouble the social order of the city. But the Bible shows that there cannot be peace without justice. We also have a tendency to describe peace as the absence of conflict. But *shalom* is so much more. In its fullness it evokes harmony, prosperity, and welfare. Today, we pray for our cities, that God would use His people to extend this *shalom* throughout the new emerging Canadian urban system.

In the New Testament, this reign of God is the royal redemptive plan of the Creator, initially given as a task marked out for Israel, then re-inaugurated in the life and mission of Jesus. This reign is to destroy his enemies, to liberate humanity from the sin of Adam and ultimately establish his authority in all spheres of the cosmos: our individual lives, the Church, society, the spirit world and ecological order. Yet, we live in the presence of the future. The Church is "between the times," as it were: between the inauguration and the consummation of the Kingdom. It is the only message worth taking to the whole city!

In light of all these realities an increasing number of congregations in my city, Montréal have adopted the following schema and the 12 indicators as a vision of what our transformed city would look like. Rooted in four concentric circles that represent God's concern for all of life beginning with the congregation that embodies *shalom* and reconciliation and subsequently demonstrates the Good News in their community, society and in all of the created order. But so as to measure realistically the vision, we have

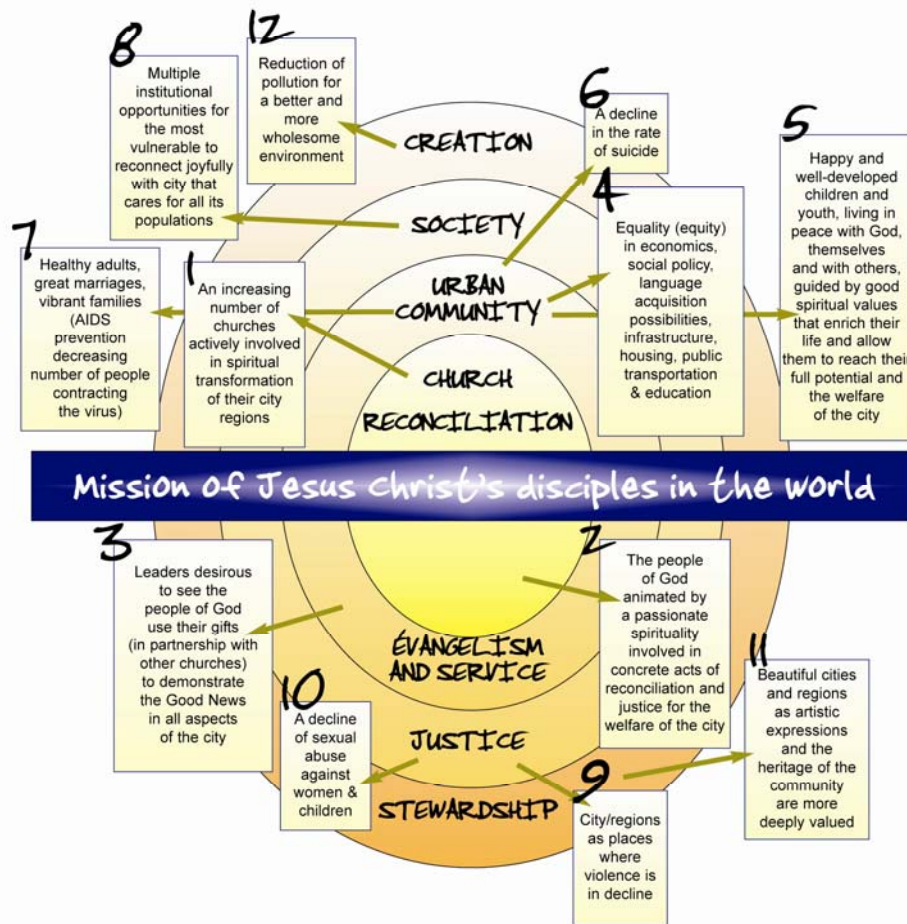
articulated 12 indicators of the type of transformation we are pursuing. These address contextual concerns in our city. Accompanying these indicators are baselines based on research on the state of life in the city. Congregations work together to pursue the welfare of the city.

This vision seeks to help the Church participate in the transformation of the city, particularly in an era of human brokenness.

## Key Indicators of a Transformed city

What would a city look like that has been transformed by Jesus Christ and his kingdom values?

Christian Direction has chosen these 12 indicators for the cities of Québec and La Francophonie that inspire our vision for a transformed city.



## Exegesis of a city

The framework that we proposed in the second section prompts us to learn more about our city-regions. When we discuss the task of the Church in a city, immediately we are struck by the necessity to address both macro and micro issues. In choosing to ‘address’ the city, we need to remember two foundational issues that are often overlooked by God’s people living in metropolitan areas.

First, it is obvious that we need to place each individual city in its own context yet understand its place in the larger urban system. Because of globalisation, no metropolitan area exists in isolation from others. When someone asks you where you live, the answer depends not only on where you are but also to whom you are talking. For example, you would tell a neighbour which street you live on, a person from your region which community you live in, from your country, you would say which province our state you live in or you would probably name the metropolitan center closest to your place of residence. Each ‘address’ tells something about you: the living environment, the languages you use on a day-to-day basis, your lifestyle and perhaps your social status. Whether one approaches this subject from a perspective of what is happening globally, in city-regions across the world, and then moves locally, to one’s own municipality, or work in the reverse order is not all that important. What is important is to see the interrelationships among the different addresses in which we live, from local to national to global. It is also important to adjust these ‘addresses’ for the audience in question.

Second, when the Church addresses the city, we must direct our attention to urban realities. We also need to understand our own assumptions and framework. As we have seen, we will always want to keep our focus on a biblical perspective on cities.

Richard Sennett defines a city as a human settlement in which strangers are likely to meet. The United Nations Population Fund documents the diversity of definitions for an urban category in its 1996 State of the World Population report. British urbanologist, David Clark (1996) has clarified many of these issues in his most recent book. He calls a population of 50,000 people or less a *town* or a *village*. On the other hand, *cities* are human agglomerations that have up to 200,000 residents. A *metropolitan area or city-region* has more than two million people, but a *megalopolis* is an urban region over five million. These distinctions are helpful because a country like Norway considers any human settlement of 200 people as urban while, Bénin, for example, only uses “urban” for places of 10,000 people or more.

Beyond definitions and the demographic function of cities known as “urban growth”, one may ask, “*What is happening in our city-regions?*” What were the conditions - inherited from the past - which have been transformed in these last thirty years that help us understand its present state? This is a fundamental question we need to explore, if we are to understand the cultural context in which the Church finds itself. Our concern points in a further direction with a second question: “How will the Church reflect biblically and pursue relevant urban mission in the years ahead?”

To answer these two questions, an attentive practitioner can use an ethnographic analysis of the culture in order to understand how social structures and human behaviour interact and influence a city. An ethnographic method is an excellent tool for the Christian practitioner who desires to study the following: the knowledge and practices of



people and the ways they use their freedom to dominate, to transform, to organize, to arrange and to master space for their personal pursuits. This all people do so as to live, to protect themselves, to survive, to produce and to reproduce. To do this one must master dominant tendencies so as to grasp where we have come from and where we are going as a society and what the mission of God in this culture will look like. (See Lingenfelter in Greenway: 1992; Bakke, Pownall, Smith: 1996)

The description for cultural analysis that we use allows a practitioner to take seriously the fact that social activity is culturally and historically specific. Urban hermeneutics allows us to *decode* the contrasts between social structure and human agency, which is constantly at work in a metropolitan area. Social institutions - the basic building blocks of a city because of their far-reaching impact - are used by human agents to create urban systems and metropolitan structures. Human activities are constrained by these structures but are also enabled by them. In attempting to understand a city, neither activities nor institutions have primacy. This distinction becomes critical as we examine the biblical categories of principalities and powers in God's project for human history.

By grasping this geography of urban functions, we are looking at issues (the social dynamics, problems, needs, aspirations and world views) that are culturally and historically specific. Like the city itself, these issues reflect the prevailing values, ideology and structure of the prevailing social formation. A useful analytical, social and theological purpose is served by the empirical recognition that urban issues are manifest in geographical space. This implies that the resulting description will detail issues "in" the city as well as issues "of" the city. For example, an issue *in* urban space would include the consequences of population density in a census district for example that has 11,536 people per square kilometre versus the norm of 847. An issue *of* urban space includes attention to the socio-economic factors that go hand-in-hand with such population concentration.

To pursue this analysis, the practitioner will need to bring a high sensitivity:

- a. to micro details in the local context,
- b. with a concern for the larger worldview influences (understood as the macro issues),
- c. beyond a simple homogenisation of the data, and
- d. to a true understanding of the differences so that we can appreciate the specifics of the area and the mission of the Church in the situation.

### ***How to do an exegesis of a city-region***

There is no "magic formula" for a congregation to participate in the transformation of a city-region. In the following suggestions, we are attempting to facilitate how one implements strategies to launch ministries in cities, not just to plant churches. F.B. Meyer once wrote, "*Christian missionaries should be strategists, expending their strength where populations teem and rivers of world-wide influence have their rise.*" In this context, it is little wonder that we must rethink our urban strategies.

There are few experts in this field, not many with great experience to share with newcomers. Humility and teachableness are absolutely essential. Referring to the urban masses, William Booth, of the Salvation Army, asked his volunteers, "*Can we weep for them? If you can't weep, we cannot use you.*"

Requirements to begin:

- Large map

- History book
- Good shoes
- A team within the congregation to study a city-region. This will make sure the vision and the results of the inquiry are more effective.
- It would be important for an urban ministry practitioner to learn how to do “community development methodology”. The writings of Robert Lithicum and Judith Lingenfelter (Greenway: 1992) are a good place to start (see Bibliography).

### *The Twenty Steps*<sup>8</sup>

These twenty steps can be divided into two sections. The first ten steps allow a congregation to understand its context. They are helpful to start different types of ministries with the community. Steps 11-20 are more useful for those preparing to plant a new congregation.

1. Compile a list of significant historical events that inform the city's identity. These could be specific, historic conflicts that took place such as a war or dispute, specific unifying events such as the city coming together to fight a massive fire, specific decisions that leaders made such as the building of a community centre, or something that happened that gave people hope, such as a person doing something heroic or selfless, etc. These will provide clues to the best way for the church to focus its energy.

Study the growth patterns of the city. One can find this information in libraries, city councils, museums, bookstores, local newspapers and on local Web sites.

- Why is the city growing (or why did it grow)?
- Who are (were) the immigrants to the city?
- Where did they come from and where are they settled?
- Where are they employed?

2. Understand clearly the sections or zones that make up the city:

- Downtown
- Blue collar neighbourhoods
- Ghettos
- Ethnic neighbourhoods
- Industrial zones
- Commercial areas

Examine census maps if they are available. Find out from city planners and real estate offices where city populations are expected to move, where commercial and industrial zones will develop, and which areas are slated to undergo major changes.

Isolate the sectors of your larger community using the representation of the city set out in the introduction to this Paper. This represents the functions of a city.

3. Study the neighbourhoods: their ethnic, social and economic composition, religious affiliations, occupational patterns, younger and older populations, concentrations of the elderly, young professionals, singles, problem groups, to understand a neighbourhood you must walk the streets, talk to people, insiders and outsiders. Census data is important but onsite observation is best. People groups criss-cross in the city. Probe to discover the dominant influence in a neighbourhood: ethnic identity? Social class? Undertake a participant-observer approach.

What is the extent of social contact between the people groups? Is social contact increasing? Take time to chat with residents and pedestrians in the area.

Ask them what are the most significant changes they see or experience in the neighbourhood.

When examining the data, notice the criteria used. When walking the streets, watch for the impact of these population shifts on the neighbourhood. Many congregations use prayer walks as a way to learn more about their city-region.<sup>9</sup>

4. Determine and analyze the power centres in the city - the political figures, the police department, business leaders and the Chamber of Commerce, religious leaders.
  - Who controls the media? (TV, radio, newspapers)
  - Who controls commerce, finance? The schools and the arts?
  - What are the religious\moral commitments of the power people?
5. Analyze the felt needs of specific people groups within the city. You are looking for indications of receptivity and "keys" which may unlock doors to homes and hearts. Felt needs vary from group to group. In some communities, such things as personal illness, loneliness, physical hardships, insecurity in terms of housing, property rights, and the threat of losing one's dwelling are very real. In other neighbourhoods the felt needs may be entirely different. Addressing felt needs is essential to holistic strategy. From the felt needs, the practitioner moves to peoples' ultimate needs and shows how Christ meets both.
6. Examine the traffic flow of the city. Just as successful advertisers know where to place their signs, practitioners need to know where to begin their ministries, where they can readily be seen and reached.  
Find out where each of the following is located:
  - Community services centres
  - library
  - police stations
  - fire stations
  - city hall
  - shopping centres
  - sports facilities.
7. Seek to discover how news and opinion spread in the city, and in particular groups. Mainly through conversation? By radio, TV? Who are the idea-people, the opinion-makers? Subscribe to the weekly publication in the area. Read it faithfully.
8. Examine the relationship between city-dwellers and the rural, small-town communities outside the city. Do certain segments of the urban population maintain strong ties with their rural cousins? Is there a lot of travel and visiting between city and village? What are the present immigration patterns from the countryside? How might the urban-rural interaction be used for the spread of the gospel and multiplication of churches? Most of this information is available in the census data that your country keeps in census files.
9. Ministries and churches in the city - locate them on a map; identify them by denomination, size and age. What transformational ministries and social services are already taking place through these ministries and churches? Reflect on what the church map shows.
10. Analyze the various types of existing churches. Common types as found in many cities are:
  - "Old First"
  - Cathedral church
  - "City-centre" churches

- Peoples' churches (large auditoriums, drawing numbers from all over the metropolitan area)
  - University church
  - Storefront churches
  - Ethnic language churches
  - Suburban churches
  - Special purpose churches (use the wheel in the introduction for ideas)
  - "Renewal" churches, the fastest growing in many countries; they are usually newer, independent
  - Cell churches.
11. Find out the growth patterns of the various churches - attendance, membership, and rate of growth. Try to determine the nature of the growth is it by transfer, conversion, or by births? One can often locate this information by chatting with congregational leaders.
  12. Inquire about church planting and church closures in the past several years. Which churches have closed? Why? Who has planted churches, and why and where did they succeed? Learn all you can from them.
  13. Who is planning to start new churches? Where and among which people groups? Find out all you can from church and mission sources as to what is being planned for the city.
  14. Strategies - what has been tried in the past, what has failed, and what was effective in starting churches and stimulating growth? Analyze the information you receive. In the light of recent church growth studies, what has been done right in this city, and where ought things be done differently?
  15. Christians and non-Christians - where are the Christians located (which may not be where they attend church)? Identify areas of the city where relatively few Christians live.
  16. Identify Christians in positions of influence in the city - in business, politics, the media, education, entertainment, and sports. Analyze their potential for wider spread of the gospel and assistance in planting churches.
  17. List and analyze the para-church ministries operating in and to the city. How might each contribute something to the overall strategy? Are there some you may want to avoid because they might have a negative influence on church multiplication?
  18. Make an inventory of all possible personnel resources that might be tapped for the carrying out of your church planting strategy. For example, are there bible school or seminary students available to help with door-to-door calling? Could workers be borrowed from existing churches to help plant new congregations?
  19. Evaluate all known methods for planting churches in light of what you know about this city, its history, people, existing churches, and particular characteristics. What methods have proven effective elsewhere, appear appropriate for this city or at least some of its communities, and are within the capabilities of your resources.
  20. List and evaluate the community agencies (private, religious and civic) that are designed to meet particular needs (literacy, overnight shelter, emergency food and clothing, etc.) and consider how their help can be incorporated into your overall strategy.

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<sup>1</sup> The United Nations Population Fund documents the diversity of definitions for an urban category in its 1996 State of the World Population report. British urbanologist, David Clark (1996) has clarified many of these issues in his most recent book. He calls a population of 50,000 people or less a *town* or a *village*. On the other hand, *cities* are human agglomerations that have up to 200,000 residents. A *metropolitan area or city-region* has more than two million people, but a *megalopolis* is an urban region over five million. These distinctions are helpful because a country like Norway considers any human settlement of 200 people as urban while, Benin, for example, only uses “urban” for places of 10,000 people or more.

<sup>2</sup> One of the few texts on urban geography that takes these two distinct categories seriously is by A. M. Orum and X. Chen, *The World of Cities: Places in Comparative and Historical Perspective*. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003). For these authors place is the specific locations in space that provide an anchor and meaning to who we are. (See pages 1, 15, 140 and 168) Our sense of place is rooted in individual identity, community, history and a sense of comfort (11-19). Space, on the other hand, is a medium independent of our existence in which objects, ideas and other human persons exist behaving according to the basic laws of nature and thought (see pages 15, 140 and 160-170).

<sup>3</sup> This approach to urban mission hermeneutics is intentional on the editor’s part. A lived experience in context is a preliminary step in all contextual theologies. This is certainly true in theologies of liberation. Leonardo Boff and Clodivis Boff call this the preliminary stage of all theologising, a living commitment with the poor and oppressed. Robert Schreier summarizes the biblical foundation well, “...the development of local theologies depends as much on finding Christ already active in the culture as it does on bringing Christ to the culture. The great respect for culture has a Christological basis. It grows out of a belief that the risen Christ’s salvific activity in bringing about the kingdom of God is already going on before our arrival. From a missionary perspective there would be no conversion if the grace of God had not preceded the missionary and opened the hearts of those who heard.” (*Constructing Local Theologies*. Maryknoll: Orbis, 1986), 29.

<sup>4</sup> This reflection is inspired by an article by David Whiteman "Contextualization: The Theory, the Gap, the Challenge" *IBMR*, 21:1, January 1997, 2-7.

<sup>5</sup> (1.) Public safety based on local police estimates of homicides per 100,000 people; (2.) Food costs representing the percentage of household income spent on food. (3.) Living space being the number of housing units and the average persons per room. (4.) Housing standards being the percentage of homes with access to water and electricity. (5.) Communication is the number of reliable sources of telecommunications per 100 people. (6.) Education is based on the percentage of children, aged 14-17 in secondary schools. (7.) Public health criteria are based on infant deaths per 1,000 live births. (8.) Peace and quiet based on a subjective scale for ambient noise. (9.) Traffic flow being the average miles per hour during rush hour. (10.) Clean air based on a one-hour concentration in ozone levels.

<sup>6</sup> The United Nations Millennium Development Goals provide a marvelous starting point for a reflection on transformation as well for a local congregation. The reader is invited to consult the web page <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/index.shtml> that describes the goals. A valuable exercise would be for the church to contextualise these eight goals in their city-region in collaboration with other churches. A congregation could use the framework of a city proposed on page 12 and develop strategies based on the concept of the rule of God and the millennium goals to pursue the social and spiritual transformation of the whole city.

<sup>7</sup> John W. de Gruchy, *Christianity, Art and Transformation: Theological Aesthetics in the struggle for Social Justice*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

<sup>8</sup> The reader can order “Exegeting your Neighbourhood” that includes case studies on how to study one’s neighbourhood from [urbanus@direction.ca](mailto:urbanus@direction.ca).

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<sup>9</sup> In the appendix to “Exegeting your Neighbourhood” (see previous footnote) there is a whole outline on how to do effective prayer walks.