



Toronto's Waterfront Community

A Church Planting Opportunity

For Professor Bowen

Church Planting

WYP2560HF

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Introduction

The following excerpt was found on the website of the East 91st Street Christian Church, located in Indianapolis, Indiana.

Canada: A Sobering Reality Check

- Approximately 85% of all Canadians have no meaningful church relationship!
- Churches are closing more rapidly in Canada than in any other country in the Western world!
- According to Outreach Canada demographic research, only 16% of Canadians attend church regularly. In urban centers like Toronto, only 5% of the population can be categorized as consistent church attenders!
- Close to 250,000 new Canadians have immigrated annually during the last decade. The majority are Muslim, Sikh, Hindu, Buddhist or Confucian. The United Nations called Toronto, “the most ethnically diverse city in the world.” The mission field is here!¹

Others see the opportunity in our own city. In fact the Southern Baptists, among others, are planting churches here, an area they regard as the most unchurched in North America. All this while, as the Diocese of Toronto's website notes “there are fewer self-declared Anglicans

¹ The East 91st Street Christian Church, [Why Plant Churches](http://www.east91st.org/content/cp_why_plant_churches.aspx), (Indianapolis: http://www.east91st.org/content/cp_why_plant_churches.aspx)

(100,000 less than there were in 1981) and yet the population has doubled.²

The City of Toronto has experienced a profound increase in population, with a resulting demographic shift. Perhaps the area that most exemplifies these changes is the community of the Central Waterfront.

When the writer worked in the financial district – King and Bay – in the late 1970's the Toronto waterfront was still, by and large, a somewhat grimy, newly post-industrial area, cut off from the downtown core by the Gardiner Expressway. Around that time, development started to occur; first with the Harbour Pointe Condominiums, then the Harbour Square Project at the foot of York Street, together with the Westin Harbourcastle Hotel. This was followed by the conversion of the old fish warehouse at York Slip into the posh Queen's Quay Terminal, the creation of an artistic community, Harbourfront Centre, the Hotel Admiral, and many more condominiums. Today, Queen's Quay is lined with condominium towers from Yonge Street west to Bathurst... and building continues. Projects are underway in the old Molson plant at Bathurst and Lakeshore, the area across the road from the Air Canada Centre, and in the former Railway Lands east of Spadina below Front Street. The latter, called CityPlace will comprise twenty condominium towers, with 7500 residential units, when it is completed within the decade.

In addition to the growth that is already occurring, there is much more planned. The City of Toronto's Waterfront Revitalization Project envisions major new developments between the Jarvis and Parliament Street slips – East Bayfront – and the "Portlands" centred on Cherry Street below the Gardiner Expressway. Altogether, the project is planned to

² Diocese of Toronto, [Demographic Changes](http://www.toronto.anglican.ca/index.asp?navid=184&fid2=2005-01-04&fid3=999), (Toronto: <http://www.toronto.anglican.ca/index.asp?navid=184&fid2=2005-01-04&fid3=999>)

include 40,000 housing units, 7.6 million square feet of new commercial space, and create 30,000 new permanent jobs.

With all of this growth, both recent and projected, there are only two “churches” in the entire Harbourfront area. Both just happen to be Anglican: St. Andrew-by-the-Lake on Centre Island, and the Mission to Seafarers in the Port of Toronto complex on Unwin Avenue. Neither are easily accessible by public transit. While beautiful, the former is a ferry ride away, followed by a lengthy walk. The latter is in the still industrial Portlands, and requires a not inconsiderable walk from the bus stop at Commissioner Street and Cherry.

The downtown Toronto churches on King Street - St. Andrew's and St. James - and above do not take that long to travel to, but psychologically they are a world away. The Gardiner Expressway and railway tracks create a very real barrier for both Harbourfront residents and the Churches themselves. There is comparatively little attention paid to one by the other. With the entertainment venues, restaurants, stores and shops that have been added in recent years, the Harbourfront community is becoming increasingly self-contained.

The Current Demographic

Between 1996 and 2001 the population of the “Waterfront Communities”, which includes the Island for census purposes, increased by 30.6% to a total of 18,530. Since that time, the pace of new condominium construction has been such that at least a similar increase in the community's population should have occurred. Arguably, at this time there should be approximately 22,000 people living in the Harbourfront area - a small city by any other standard. Between the CityPlace and the Portlands projects, a further 50,000 residents will be added to this community. With such a significant current population and future growth potential there should be a more than adequate population base to support the planting of one or more new churches.

As may be expected in a downtown community comprised mostly of high-rise condominiums, there are fewer young people - infants, children and youth - and seniors than are generally found throughout other parts of the City. Indeed, over 60% of the population in 2001 were between the ages of 25 and 50. Adults of working age - 25 to 64 - comprised fully 71.7% of the residents. Less than 10% were over age 65.³

Ethnicity and Language are also different from the norm in Toronto. There are fewer immigrants, and members of visible minorities, in the Harbourfront neighbourhood. The incidence of Canadian citizenship is higher, at 86.7%. An amazing 74.48% spoke English as their general custom in the home.⁴

Over half the resident population enjoys an income in excess of \$50,000. In fact, 23.8% have incomes of \$100,000 or more. The median household income in 2001 was \$59,496. Less than 16% of the residents earned less than \$20,000 per year.

Conclusion

The Harbourfront population is relatively young, educated and upwardly mobile. They work, for the most part, in white collar occupations. Many are professionals of one variety or another. Although the demographic information did not indicate such, personal observation (I live in the area myself) tells me that many residents are unattached. Most, even those in a relationship, are childless.

They are at the point in their lives when they are starting to wonder what it's really all about. If they have not yet experienced ennui, stress and burnout they will before too very long, and begin looking for answers. "Traditionally", as we know, they have not looked to organized religion at such times, but to other spiritual paths. We have all seen the

³ Toronto Community and Neighbourhood Services, 2001 Waterfront Communities – The Island: Social Profile #1 – Age and Gender Neighbourhoods, (Toronto: City of Toronto, 2003), 2

⁴ Toronto Community and Neighbourhood Services, 2001 Waterfront Communities – The Island: Social Profile #3 – Neighbourhoods Immigration, Ethnicity, Language (Toronto: City of Toronto, 2003)

exponential growth in the self-help and New Age sections of the bookstore. At some point there is a discovery that life is too big to do alone. At that point, I believe that many will be open to a different way of being church, if the church can meet them where they are, and address their needs in ways they find meaningful.

I believe that such a population provides substantial opportunities to plant a non-traditional church.