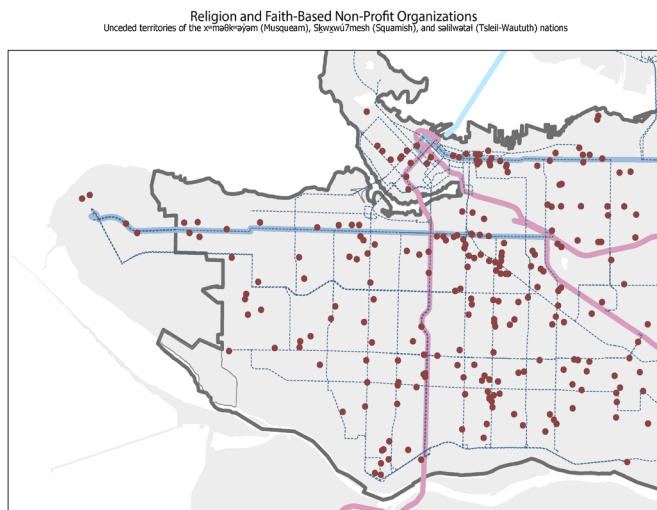


# RELIGION AND FAITH BASED NON-PROFITS

JULY 2020

This brief summarizes the impact of COVID-19 on Vancouver's religious and faith-based non-profit sector. It is a compilation of key excerpts from several surveys, reports and key informant interviews. Highlights have been thematically arranged to provide: an overview of the sector across Vancouver; a brief description of the role and contribution of sports and recreation non-profits; an outline of key issues, needs and barriers; and innovative and resilient responses adopted by the sector that show promise moving forward.

## The Religion and Faith-Based Non-Profit Sector in Vancouver: Overview



Locations of 358 Religious or Faith-Based organizations in Vancouver Data Source: BC211 service directory list accessed April 2020 and ACCS community non-profit partners inventory. Note that locations may reflect an organization's office location rather than where programs and services occur.

- Religion and Faith-based organizations help people to explore and cultivate deeply held beliefs; to participate in rituals of meaning; to find comfort in times of pain and sorrow; and to foster relationship in community.
- Often at the heart of their communities, Religion and Faith-based organizations act as a point of initial contact for people new to a neighbourhood or community. They tend to serve the general public regardless of faith and they are less likely than other non-profits and voluntary organizations to have membership restrictions.
- Communities of faith, faith-based organizations and places of worship also offer community serving spaces which are an integral part of achieving healthy and complete communities.
- A Canada-wide study of religious non-profits in 2005

identified that religious-based charities are generally well established, over 51% of organizations had been in existence for over 40 years and approximately 94% had registered charitable status.

- Religious organizations receive more donations than any other type of organization because they have both a broad base of support and their supporters make large average donations. Rideau Hall Foundation and Imagine Canada estimate that over 40% of all donations go towards religious organizations.
- The key strengths of Religion and Faith-based organizations include their local community focus and the contributions drawn from dedicated donors, volunteers, and staff. Some of the challenges identified in the sector include a reliance on individual donations as a single source of revenue and the need to engage a broader cross-section of the population for donations and volunteer support.
- The needs, characteristics and social impact of Religion and Faith-based organizations vary according to the degree that faith and religion are integrated in an organization's structure and programming. This variation can be seen through each organization's: mission statement, founders, affiliations, selection of controlling board, senior management, staff/volunteers, source of financial/nonfinancial support, and religious practices of personnel. Community interventions coming out of Religion and Faith-based groups can be understood on a spectrum shifting from faith-permeated, to faith-centered, faith-affiliated, faith-background, faith-secular partnerships, to secular efforts on the other side (See Sider and Unruh 2004).

## Contribution of Religion and Faith-based Non-Profit organizations in Vancouver

- Religious charities and faith-based organizations foster vibrant social networks, spark local volunteerism, and foster community resiliency.
- Places of worship provide a place for gathering, particularly

for their members. In addition, these spaces also provide affordable, accessible, and inclusive services and programs that meet community need through the delivery of social, cultural, and recreational initiatives. Community-based initiatives implemented by religion and faith-based non-profits are adaptive to changing communities. These non-profits provide benefit to individuals, particularly equity-seeking groups and people from diverse populations.

- A recent mapping of community serving spaces identified 266 places of worship in the city of Vancouver. This important social infrastructure has a long history of offering space and services to city resident by providing spaces for childcare, food programs, recreational and cultural programs, and meeting spaces for informal groups.
- Religion and Faith-based non-profits mobilize a large number of volunteers. Statistics Canada reports that formal volunteers dedicate on average 109 hours to Religion and Faith-based organizations, making them the second largest sector after hospitals, with the highest average of volunteer hours dedicated to a specific organization type.
- Research shows that the impact of religious-motivated action has significant benefit for communities. This is reflected in refugee sponsorship efforts, projects focused on the alleviation of poverty, care for individuals experiencing homelessness, and the provision of health care (such as long-term care for seniors and palliative care). As a sector, Religion and Faith-Based organizations are less likely than other non-profits to require membership to access their services with (69%) indicating that both members and non-members from communities directly benefit from their services (Brownlee et al, 2005).
- Statistics Canada also has shown that religiously affiliated people not only give generously to their religious congregations but are more prone to give to charities of any kind.
- Religious leaders, faith-based organizations, and communities of faith are among the most trusted sources of information, as well as both pastoral, health, and social care in local communities. They are key social assets and community mobilizers that contribute to healthy cities and communities.
- The World Health Organization highlighted that religious leaders of faith-based organizations and communities of faith play an important role in sharing health information to protect their own members and wider communities. This information may be more widely accepted when coming from these sources. These organizations can provide pastoral and spiritual support during public health emergencies and can advocate for the needs of vulnerable populations.
- A Canadian based study through the Halo project reported that every dollar a congregation or religious

group spends can create up to \$4.77 worth of services a city does not have to provide. The Halo Project also has an online calculator that, estimates for Canadian cities the worth of common good services provided, using expenditure spending from data from the Canada Revenue Agency. The estimate of the value of services provided by congregations or religious groups in the city of Vancouver totals \$1.425 billion dollars in common good services

### **Impacts of Covid-19 on Religion and Faith based Non-Profit Organizations in Vancouver**

The Religion and Faith-based sector is facing significant operational challenges as a result of public health measures meant to stop the spread of COVID-19. Religious charities, faith-based organizations, and communities of faith are facing big shifts in the way they engage with individuals due to physical distancing and capacity restrictions, significant financial pressure from decreasing charitable donations and workforce and volunteer challenges.

The COVID-19 pandemic has created greater operational, financial and workforce challenges for the sector and the individuals who use their religious and faith-based programs and services.

#### ***Operational Challenges: Shifts in the sector and the effects on impacted communities***

- Changing service levels: The Waybase study revealed that as of May 2020 11% of organizations maintained normal services, 69% of organizations reduced services, 9% had increased services, and 11% had temporarily closed. The Waybase study also showed that religious non-profits are nimble and are adapting operations to meet community need. 69% of faith-based organizations added or prioritized online services (notably, 81% of churches), 34% shifted to offer telephone services and 34% of organizations now offer new services to meet the practical needs caused by COVID-19.
- Technical challenges: Community input and the Waybase study both drew attention to the needs and technical operational challenges experienced by smaller organizations. These Religion and Faith-based non-profits are more likely to close or have reduced services than larger organizations and they indicate the need for technology upgrades in order to provide online services. In terms of specific responses and programs:
  - 86% of organizations are keeping the members of their communities connected;
  - 81% are encouraging their members to engage in social distancing;
  - 76% are providing pastoral/counseling support;
  - 62% are providing practical support to vulnerable members of the community;
  - 43% are helping with distribution of food or supplies; and

- 23% are mobilizing volunteers to support healthcare or essential services.
- Food banks: Local Religion and Faith-based non-profits have reported that although children and youth programs have slowed down, food bank services have tripled. Organizations are keen to continue to have their offices open and continue to provide some visits and in-person programs following appropriate health and safety protocols.
- Virtual gatherings: Some organizations indicated that given the physical distancing restrictions and religious specific prohibitions, some faith-based gatherings, ceremonies and rituals can't take place virtually. This poses a significant challenge for ensuring meaningful community connection and spiritual practice. Additionally, certain populations may be experiencing higher levels of social isolation (seniors for example) and they may be unable to access these virtual gatherings or see other people due to their higher risk for COVID-19

### **Financial Pressures**

- Changing revenue levels: The Waybase study reported that faith-based organizations typically experience 2-5% changes in revenue on a month-month basis. However the pandemic has caused major decreases in revenue, closer to 10-50% for most organizations. Over half of respondents noted that the main cause of revenue losses was the inability to receive donations due to organizations not meeting physically, with 52% of respondents also noting that their donors had lost personal income, or even their jobs.
- Long-term concerns: Community input emphasized that should strict protocols return in the fall, the majority of religious and faith-based organizations will face very difficult financial situations with the consequences of a second shut down unknown. Organizations are being asked to provide increased services, with less staff and decreased revenue.

### **Workforce and Human Resources**

- Employment: The Waybase study found that 26% of BC Christian charities laid off staff. Most organizations have found increased demand for services and increased time required, effectively meaning that remaining staff have to deliver the same amount of programs with fewer resources.
- Changes in staff activities: The Waybase survey reports that the pandemic has shifted how staff spend their time, with a significant proportion of organizations reporting spending more time preparing for worship services (52%) (presumably to accommodate COVID-19/new technology requirements), meeting the needs of the people in their ministry (47%), and dealing with staffing issues (44%).

- Growth in activities: Although some local Religion and Faith-based non-profits have reported staff layoffs, services and offerings carried out on volunteer basis continue with greater uptake. Some organizations are seeing a growth in activities as people in the community have reached out, wanting to connect on a spiritual level as a result of the pandemic.

### **High-level supports needed**

The following high-level supports have been identified by environmental non-profit operators through interviews and reviews of the existing research:

- Core operating funding free from onerous requirements.
- Additional staff in specific roles that have seen increased need post-COVID. Roles include support with online sales and skilled volunteer coordination.
- Flexible funding that leads to greater resiliency; specifically allowing grantees to put funds towards operating costs.
- Grants to support growing operations, rather than grants for new programs or innovations.

### **The City's role and requested support for the sector**

The City's support was requested in the following areas

- Regular check-ins with city staff or elected officials to help build relationships, especially with smaller religious communities in the city but also with other levels of government.
- Help to make technology and tech upgrades accessible for religious and faith-based organizations.
- Advocate with the Federal government to make changes to CRA regulations governing the charitable sector to remove barriers to fundraising and charitable tax receipts.
- Raise the profile of the non-profit sector, including the needs and contributions of all non-profits including religion and faith-based organizations in the wider community.
- Allowing religious groups to book space or advertise programs in City-owned community centres.
- Highlighting local charities and non-profits and provide incentives to encourage donations and support to local organizations

### **Resiliency in the religious and faith-based Sector: Innovative responses to the crisis and positive outcomes**

Despite these significant challenges the sector has shown the ability to adapt and meet the needs of community members. The following areas of resilience and strength were identified through conversations with Religion and Faith based non-profits:

- Greater collaboration, more information sharing and partnerships and potential for new and innovative programming.
- Increased engagement of members of the wider community with religious and faith-based non-profits out of an interest to connect with community on a spiritual level and support those affected by the pandemic.
- Weekly food delivery programming has been a positive experience for some organizations that plan to continue with similar program post-pandemic.

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