

2008

Hillhurst United Church

Discover, Dream, Design

In March 2008, the congregation at Hillhurst United Church embarked on a journey to discern a vision of its collective future. The guiding foundation evolved in the form of Core Values and supporting foundational statements that described its identity, purpose and vision. Some strategic directions were also identified in the form of Provocative Proposals circa 2014. The following report synthesizes the three congregational events and the work of the Vision Team over the past nine months.

Table of Contents:

- ◇ Executive Summary
- ◇ Foundational Statements
 - Identity
 - Purpose
 - Vision
- ◇ Core Values
- ◇ Five Provocative Proposals
 - Justice
 - Spirituality and the Arts
 - Worship
 - Community
 - Twenty-Thirty “Something’s”
- ◇ Appendices

December 2008



Executive Summary

Your Visioning Team first met in March 2008 and continued to meet regularly each month with increased gatherings prior to and following our three major congregational events – Discover (June); Dream (September) and Design (November). The team and other volunteers worked very hard to create interesting, thought provoking and productive ‘workshop’ format events broadly promoted to welcome one and all. Total attendance was nearly 400 at the three events which contrasted greatly to the more typical numbers that engage in church processes of this nature. The Vision team has high confidence that the information gathered at these events is representative of our congregation.

The experience, guidance, consultative and facilitator skills provided by Don McLeod were essential to the outcomes arrived at in short period of time.

To discern and understand our connection to the community around us, team members spent many hours listening to the conversations in our midst. We also engaged community or business leaders in some intentional conversations about their perceptions of HUC and community trends and issues.

Much time was spent in determining the words that best described the Core Values of HUC. The themes of HOSPITALITY, SPIRITUALITY AND JUSTICE, clearly emerged from the Discover & Design events. Feedback gathered at the Design event indicated very positive endorsement of those words and the meanings behind them.

Foundational statements were created from all we heard and recorded. A gifted writer, Susan Cooper, crafted words that form statements describing our Purpose, Identity and Vision.

The team was encouraged to take a bold step in creating stretching strategies, known as Provocative Proposals, around the themes of Justice; Spirituality and the Arts; Worship; Community-Third Place and the Twenty Thirty ‘Something’ generation. Drafts were presented at the Design event and modified based on the excellent and enthusiastic feedback. Many of the activities in the Provocative Proposals build on what is alive and well in our midst today. They are intended to provoke some ambitious and bold discussion and decisions in the years ahead. While elements within the PP’s must be tested against the realities of our building and its infrastructure, expansion capabilities, staffing, budget resources and congregational energy and creativity; it is important that they remain alive and guide future action plans and goals. We hope the creation of additional or updated Provocative Proposals becomes an annual initiative within the many current or emerging ministries at HUC.

There were some interesting suggestions towards creating some new ‘tag line’ phrases that succinctly capture who we are as a community of faith; however, this process is incomplete. We have faith these will emerge in due course.

The Vision Team was grateful for the confidence of the HUC Board and the ability to move forward with the independence and necessary resources to complete what was asked of us. The appended information is submitted with gratitude for giving us the opportunity to serve our blessed church.

Bryce Paton, Sharon Higgins, Judy Presber, Lisa MacBeth, Deb Bartlett, Jackie Pyke, Lance Humeniuk, Terry Lindberg, John Pentland and Don McLeod

Foundational Statements

Identity

Based upon an ethic that deems all life sacred, Hillhurst United Church is a progressive Christian community called to the reclamation of the ancient and holy art of hospitality. We understand that radical hospitality is not a gesture, but a state of spiritual being from which gesture arises, and that there is nothing of heaven or earth unworthy of that hospitality. We understand the challenges of such a radical hospitality in the world, and also its transformative force, while acknowledging humbly that we are at all times both host and guest.

Hillhurst United Church is a spirited community of seekers. With doors and hearts wide open, we explore and embrace life in its God-given diversity of people, ideas, and calls to service. We practice a relevant theology that celebrates our ongoing and deepening relationship with the Divine. We do so humbly and joyfully, and with the hope that our presence will be the change we want to see in the world.

We recognize that any true religion is always about love. Hillhurst United Church is a Christian community seeking to embody and enact ever-more fully the love of God and neighbour, which we know by grace to be one and the same thing. Based on the call of Jesus and an ethic of reverence for all existence, we are committed to a continual and evolving realization and manifestation of love in our own lives and in the world.

Prayerfully, this is our stance in the world.

Purpose

Because we believe we must be the change we want to see, we, by the loving grace of God, engender soul into action in our own lives, and in the world. We do this through reflective and celebratory worship, joyful and faithful community activity, and prayerful work in the world.

Our growing faith in Spirit finds expression as we engender soul into action in our own lives, and in the world. We do this with God's grace through meaningful worship, joyful and faithful community activity, and prayerful work in the world.

Recognizing that love is the ultimate reality—of an inner dimension and of the present moment—we recognize also the deep need and challenge of bringing that love to light in a complex, postmodern world. We accept that the royal road to a clear, just and loving heart is to *know thyself*, which we aim to do, individually and corporately, through exploration and reflection in worship, community activity and learning, and prayerful service in the world.

Vision

Because the act of hospitality is a holy giving and receiving without end, Hillhurst United Church is a growing and evolving community dedicated to the ongoing creative and discerning response to the many ways in which Spirit calls us to be in community and to serve. Following Jesus, we humbly aspire to be leaders and servants to each other, and to the wider civic community, calling all citizens to the joy and challenge of an ethic that holds all of life sacred.

Hillhurst United Church aspires to spark alive in many faithful ways the light of soul, devoted both to our own community, and the community at large. As a vibrant home, as a community leader, and as a conscientious neighbour in the widest possible sense, Hillhurst United Church is a responsive centre for spiritual solace, evolution and expression.

We aspire to transform ourselves and the world in the image of a God of love, which is the image of God in us. We humbly pray for ongoing connection with the Sacred, and brave discernment that will lead us to be always ever-present to the needs of our own community and to the community at large. In this way, we will build a vibrant church of faith, relevance and connection in the world.

Core Values

Hospitality

At Hillhurst United Church we practice radical hospitality.

Hebrews 13:2 states “Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it.”

Rationale: HUC Board have cited hospitality as a “working ethic” rooted in the biblical call to hospitality. This makes sense given the affirming process of HUC in 2008. Inclusivity is a key HUC brand compared to other more conservative churches. There is an increasing diversity of the congregation. The banner outside the church welcomes all people. The sanctuary speaks of welcomeness. The lunch is incredibly well attended.

Spirituality

At Hillhurst United Church we seek the sacred connection in all of life.

Galatians 5:25 states “Since we live by the spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.”

Rationale: There are a number of educational opportunities offered at HUC and they are well attended. These include “Fire and Grace” and “Living the Question.” The weekly service is designed to be open and embrace spirituality. Sermons are offering a critical, relevant, and progressive message. Musical participation and variety is a highlight for many. Rituals such as communion, baptism, kneading bread, passing of the peace deepen spiritual life and are embraced by the congregation. An increasing number of children are part of worship. There is recognition that spirituality is a user friendly term for both peoples inside and outside HUC.

Justice

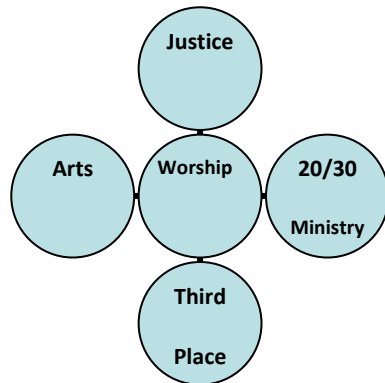
At Hillhurst United Church we commit to justice which is what love looks like in public.

“And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.” Micah 6:8

Rationale: There is a sense that people want to live what they believe and see the church proclaim commitment to that. Social justice is on the forefront at HUC, not a side committee. There is also a high commitment to Inn from the Cold, Homelessness Initiative, and the outreach committee.

Provocative Proposals

Provocative proposals point to real desired possibilities that stretch the status quo. These proposals are a synthesis of the dreams for HUC that emerged at our congregational events in June, September and November. The team also sought the input from a variety of HUC Committee, staff and congregants during the drafting of each Provocative Proposal. They are written as if it is the year **2014**.



Provocative Proposal: Justice

The Hillhurst community has a longstanding history of supporting social justice organizations and their initiatives, and Hillhurst United Church will continue in this tradition.

Provocative Proposal: Spirituality and the Arts

The congregation of Hillhurst United Church is recognized for the inclusion of the arts as an integral part of its cutting edge worship, spiritual education and demonstration of inclusivity and renewed community vision.

Provocative Proposal: Worship

Hillhurst United Church is recognized for the breadth and depth of its worship services – contemporary sights and sounds in a historic setting.

Provocative Proposal: Community - Third Place

Hillhurst United Church was nominated again this year by the Kensington Community Association for the City of Calgary's Community Enhancement Award. This award recognizes non profit groups that are seen to make a significant contribution to both the community around them and to the city at large.

Provocative Proposal: Twenty and Thirty Something's

Hillhurst United Church and the endeavour to minister to the needs and interest of the generation of young people and young families who may be classified as Generation X and Y has a unique challenge.

Provocative Proposal: Justice: 2014

“When you pray, move your feet.” African proverb

The Hillhurst community has a longstanding history of supporting social justice organizations and their initiatives, and Hillhurst United Church will continue in this tradition of acting on social justice issues.

The congregation of Hillhurst United Church has taken on, as part of its mission, the objective that justice remains an important focus of its spiritual life. Related, hospitality and generosity are important characteristics of Hillhurst United Church and therefore, we will utilize these to pursue our social justice objectives to make a positive difference locally and globally. Justice entails both environmental and social issues. We remain sensitive to the fact we are not a political organization, however do make an effort to have an impact and remain relevant.

We are concerned about our environment and want to ensure it remains healthy for future generations. Hillhurst United Church has one full-time paid staff member dedicated to organize and track our initiatives. Over 75% of our membership is actively engaged in social/environmental justice initiatives. The congregation does more than just talk about these issues – when we pray, we move our feet.

- We are actively committed to reducing the effects of climate change as well as other environmental issues such as:
 - we take public transportation, walk, bike or car pool to church at least 50% of the time;
 - we are involved in urban planning issues to ensure that Calgary and our Kensington neighbourhood evolves to accommodate eco-friendly means of transportation such as: cycling, walking and public transportation;
 - Our congregation purchases foodstuffs that are locally made or grown as much as possible, (i.e. farmer's markets rather than big-box stores).
 - Our congregation brings in subject matter experts to educate us on topics such as: benefits and risks of nuclear power, causes of climate change etc.;
- We have embraced a poverty reduction agenda in our Kensington neighbourhood, our city, and our world:
 - We have direct involvement in initiatives to end homelessness such as ... (TBD)?
 - we use our influence as a congregation and sit at a number of tables and collaborations that advocate for changes to policies that keep individuals and families in poverty;
 - We are part of the global common and provide micro-credit loans to girls and women in ... (TBD)?

- We are loud and bold and take stands on various social justice issues:
 - We are an affirming congregation in support of our gay, lesbian and transgendered brothers and sisters;
 - Provide opportunities for those wanting to get more involved in social justice issues;
 - Significant involvement with aboriginal community;

Although each of these initiatives is modest when considered alone, collectively they demonstrate that the congregation of Hillhurst United Church doesn't just talk about action; we act, locally and globally.

Provocative Proposal: Spirituality and the Arts: 2014

The congregation of Hillhurst United Church is recognized for the inclusion of the arts as an integral part of its cutting edge worship, spiritual education and demonstration of inclusivity and renewed community vision.

Our 100-year-old sanctuary and the recently opened adjoining multi-purpose performance space, complete with panorama video screens and state of the art sound system, is humming with activities every day of the week.

People arrive early for the first Sunday service to enjoy a morning coffee and conversation with a backdrop of soothing live music from the choir, small ensemble or solo performers. Alternative arts services during the week incorporate Taize chanting, drum circles and liturgical dance.

The sights and sounds of the performing and avant-garde visual arts enable spiritual connection, salve for the soul, pure entertainment and personal growth for the congregation and the community it serves.

Our choir is a mosaic of young and old seated against a backdrop of one of Calgary's oldest and finest pipe organs. There is a mix of contemporary and traditional songs and music as they give voice to Hillhurst United Church's values of hospitality, inclusiveness and spiritual growth. Special performances are given throughout the year by our youth choir during worship service. The HUC Teen programs engage our young people in a variety of activities including the arts – often a part of Sunday services and special events.

Hillhurst United Church's annual musical production draws participation from over 100 young and old of all abilities. Chancel dramas bring the Bible to life with contextual relevance through creative words and actions integrated into Sunday worship. A long-time resident theatre group 'Inside Out' delight audiences at Hillhurst United with performances by its cast of developmentally disabled actors.

Affordable piano, art or dance lessons are provided by church and community volunteer teachers. Emerging artists from our congregation and community have a venue to display their creations as they adorn our walls and halls.

Art shows, orchestral performances, musical production, drum circles, drama productions and an audio-video production suite are just some of the many active and passive demonstrations of how our vibrant and still-growing church community values the arts. The circle widens, with revenues from shows and performances being directed to assist community and global outreach programs specifically targeting the promotion of the arts as one of the many channels connecting us to the Holy Spirit.

Provocative Proposal: Worship: 2014

Hillhurst United Church is recognized for the breadth and depth of its worship services – contemporary sights and sounds in a historic setting.

Less than ten years ago, Hillhurst United Church, like many in Calgary, was struggling with a congregation in decline. Today, we are a seven day a week church centered around Sunday worship services filled to capacity. Those in attendance at our various forms of worship services are representative of the cultural diversity of our city and the inclusiveness we embrace while living our core congregational values of hospitality, spirituality and justice. We proudly remember our Affirming Celebration of 2008 when the rainbow symbol representing all of God's children regardless of age, gender, race, sexual orientation, differing abilities or religious, ethnic or economic backgrounds was made known to all.

The first of our Sunday services begins early as early birds, coffee in-hand, migrate onto the 100 year-old pews. One of our house bands, solo musicians or choir ensembles quietly break the stillness that surrounded those who have been in quiet reflective prayer since our doors opened with the dawn.

Each of our Sunday services are unique in some form, from the traditional to the very contemporary, but the messages from each of our full time ministers follow a common theme of 'relevancy' to today's world. With a newspaper in one hand and a bible in the other, the word of God continues to find new meaning for our time and place.

Sunday is not the only day of the week where worship takes many forms at Hillhurst United Church. During the week, alternative worship services such as Fire and Grace, which began in 2008, are held. We are a church of many sounds and voices – drumming, chanting or meditative music accompanying liturgical dance are just part of our diversity. There is also the sound of children from our ever-expanding Sunday School; the sound of silence in prayer space created in our new annex building; and the sounds of music, laughter and conversation from our youth ministry. Our long-standing tradition of an annual 'pet-blessing' service is another example of our spiritual connection to all God's children – and creatures.

Known as a seven-day-a-week church for many years, we are also a 12 month of the year church with worship service format that draws new faces and old on summer Sunday mornings. Outdoor services, guest clergy and post-service activities such as picnics, sports, hiking and participation in community events make this season a special and unique time in our church year.

We recognize emerging social media as part of our extended worship. Discussion and debate continues 24/7 via our website chat groups and thousands reached via the ministry beyond our doors download a weekly podcast of Sunday sermons.

While embracing diversity and many forms of worship, we also recognize there are those in our midst who are drawn to Hillhurst United Church each Sunday for simply an hour of quiet reflection, prayer and the spiritual comfort of knowing God's unconditional love and grace.

Provocative Proposal: Community-Third Place: 2014

Hillhurst United Church was nominated again this year by the Kensington Community Association for the City of Calgary's Community Enhancement Award. This award recognizes non profit groups that are seen to make a significant contribution to their local communities and to the city at large. Described as "The Hub of the Kensington Community", HUC works collaboratively with a number of local community groups and city wide programs to offer diverse social, educational, spiritual and recreational programs for all ages.

The church building has been recently renovated and the additional space, together with the joint lease of another building, has allowed HUC to make an even greater contribution to its membership and the larger community. The well-used "Drop in Centre for Youth", is just one example of a successful initiative involving HUC, several other churches, and key stakeholders from the Kensington community.

Considered by many to be on the "cutting edge", HUC promotes inclusivity and acceptance -"wherever you are on the journey" while encouraging individuals to place themselves on the edge of discomfort. Those seeking spiritual growth can choose from a variety of programs such as: Youth Group, Conversations about Scripture, Comparative Religion, Wine and Spirituality, and Yoga and Meditation. In addition, HUC facilities are shared by a number of spiritual communities; Muslim, Christian, Buddhist, Rainbow Church, Global Faith, etc. Once a month these groups join together for a potluck social. HUC also shares the lease of a spiritual retreat centre.

Along with opportunities for spiritual growth, the addition of a coffee bar in front of the church has drawn a diverse group of people looking for meaningful and relevant conversation. Working together with another Kensington coffee shop, profits from the sale of organic coffee, tea, and books, are reinvested into the local and global community. Throughout the week the Cafe hosts a variety of speakers and engages folks in conversation. It also sponsors community concerts and dances. For several years now the Cafe has offered "Reel Theology", a program that invites individuals to watch a currently popular film or video clip and embark in lively discussion. The cafe also provides free wireless internet service and a virtual library.

As part of a community enhancement initiative, HUC shares space in the Kensington gardens. This allows individuals to meet, tend the earth, and create sustainable, organic food. Food is grown here for impoverished families, and for the ever-popular church lunches.

A nearby building jointly leased and renovated in 2011 has become The Centre for Education and Leadership. Courses here continue to evolve and include such topics as: Post-Recession Financial Planning; Dating and Mating; Building Even Healthier Relationships; Aging Gracefully; Caring for an Aging Parent; Supporting your Gay, Lesbian, Bi-sexual, or Transgender Son or Daughter; Communicating Effectively in a Virtual World; Blending Families, ESL/Literacy Initiative; etc...

Along with the Education and Leadership courses, HUC has continued to host a variety of community groups who use the space throughout the 7 day week. Some of these groups include: 12 Step Groups, Services for Seniors, Counselling and Advocacy Programs, Before and After School Care, Theatre and Arts....

Provocative Proposal: Twenty and Thirty "Something's": 2014

Hillhurst United Church and the endeavour to minister to the needs and interest of the generation of young people and young families who may be classified as Generation X and Y has a unique challenge.

As a generation that has grown up in the "instant age" this younger generation requires a different delivery system to stay connected to and interested in the happenings of their church and community.

It is proposed that to connect to this generation will require changes in a variety of areas. First, a major means of communication and identity for this demographic is through the use of technology. As such it is proposed that attendance to Hillhurst United Church can and will happen online for this demographic through an independent site that will be designed with the goal of becoming one of the Top Ten Favourite sites amongst 20 to 39 something's in our city. Restructuring that allows 20 to 30 something's easy access to and communication through the internet. Used as an educational tool for current topics (including relevant insights to bible study), an easily accessed calendar to find out how they can be involved, as well as ongoing social networking / information gathering source – achieved interactively through blogs, chat rooms, forums, podcasts, etc. The goal of the site is not only to find a way to catch the interest and imagination of this demographic, but to allow for a "real" connection to Hillhurst to continue/ exist even if they travel, move away.

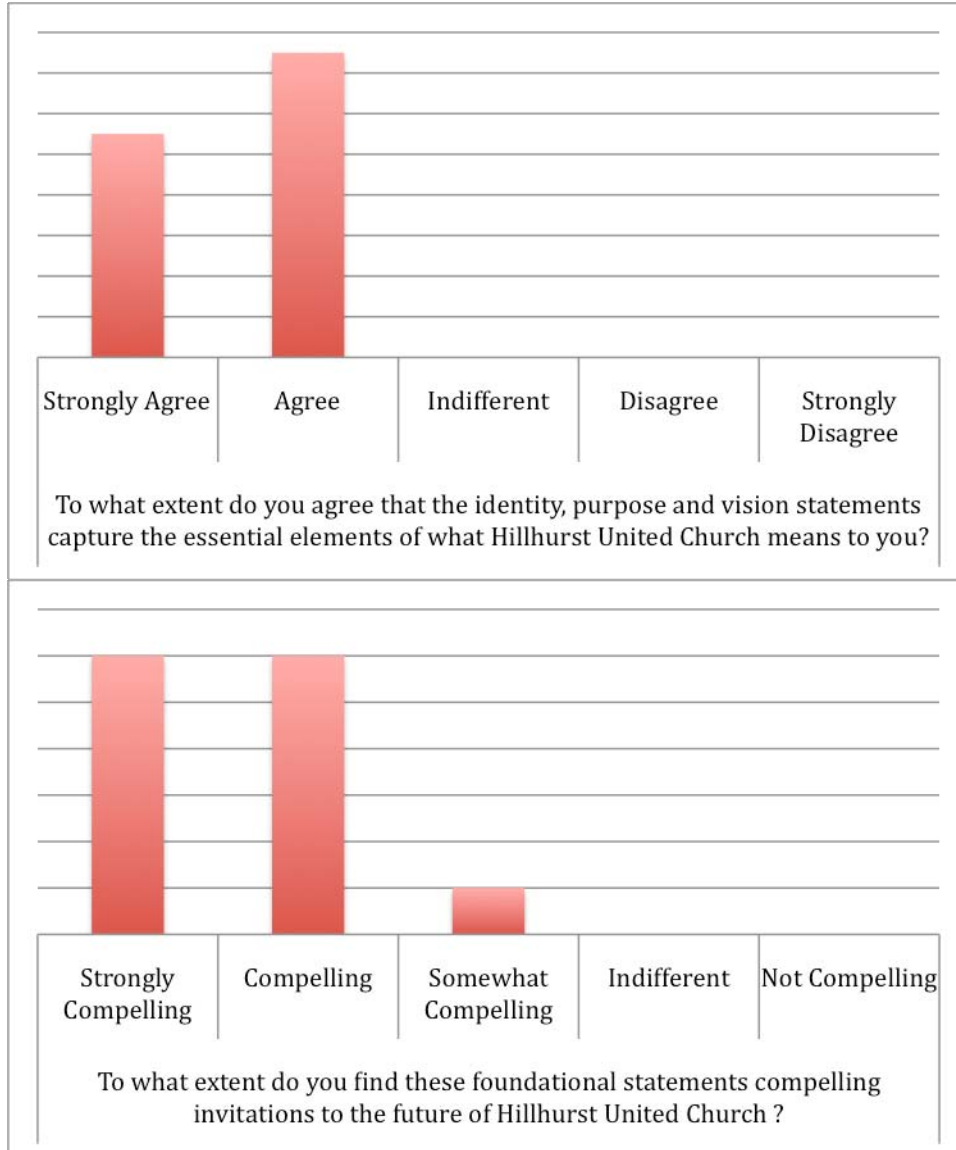
Seeing that this generation is constantly questioning and researching through various means, the connection to the Hillhurst United Church website will also serve as an educational tool with real research and insight into the history and relevance of Christianity and other religions. This will continue to be extended by educational topics and discussion groups online and also in Kensington on a regular basis.

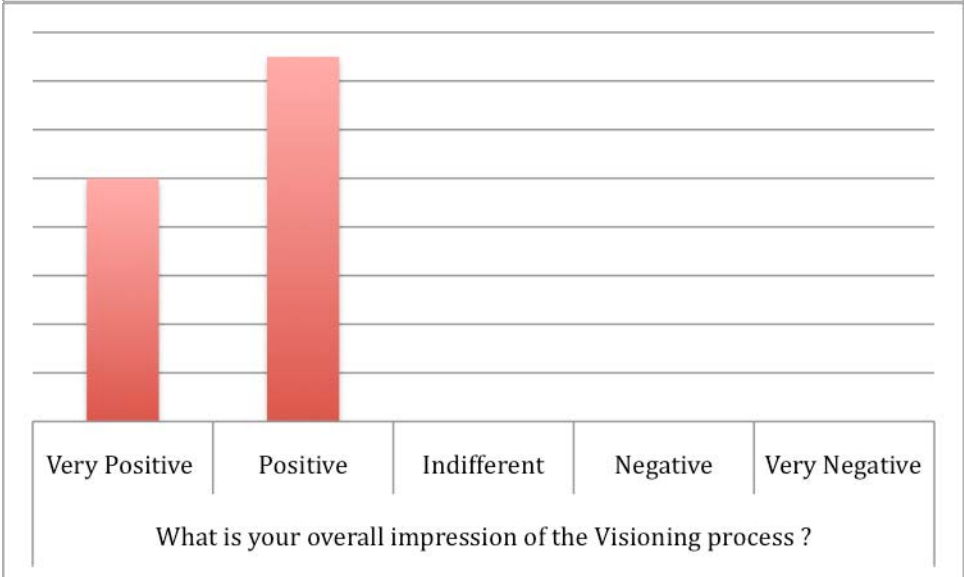
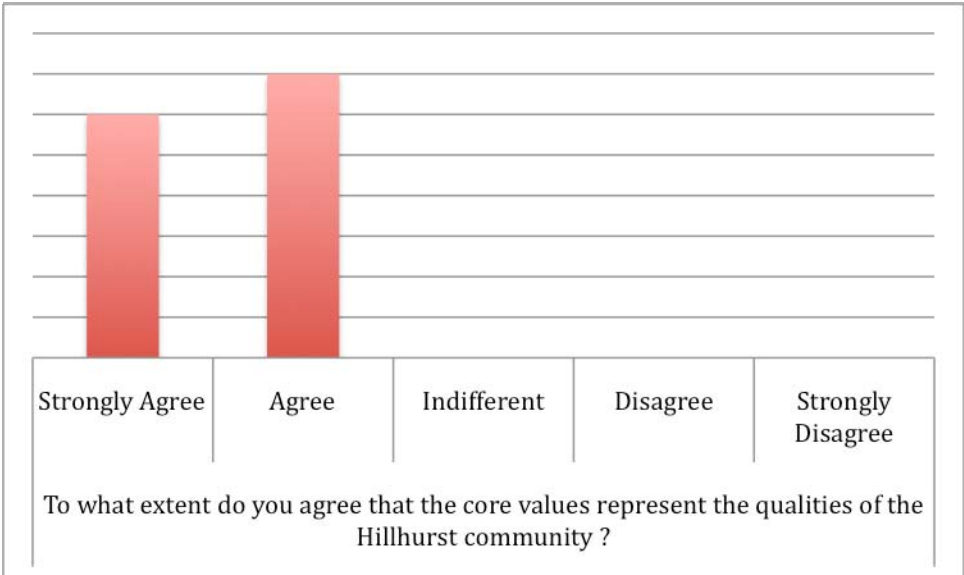
The "Discuss - Decide- Do" series will be an ongoing social event that finds 20 and 30 something's meeting in a series of 3 times. Once to discuss relevant social causes that they could help with, then deciding to take action, and finally doing something as a group.

For this multitasking generation that is often stretched in a variety of directions, it is important that these are fun, unimposing meetings based on meaningful, purposeful events that have immediate results. The reality for, this generation is that they will respect a church that allows them the flexibility to access it in a number of different ways - while attending a Sunday service might happen occasionally, a member from this generation will understand that there are a number of ways of being part of this church on line, in a discussion group, or around the community, trying to make tiny but tangible differences will make them feel equally connected.

Appendix One

Graphical representation of 'Design' event participant responses to a series of questions are noted below. These questions were posed for the purpose of seeking a representative sampling of the degree of support to the words that emerged from the Discover & Dream events in discerning our foundational statements and core values. There appears to be strong support for, not only the Visioning Process, but the words that describe our Identity, Purpose and Vision statements and the Core Values of Hospitality, Spirituality and Justice.





Appendix Two

Vision Team members formally met with the individuals, local businesses or organizations residing in the Hillhurst/Kensington community. The conversations were guided by the questions:

- ◇ Impressions of HUC – past and present
- ◇ Trends/Issues in our <broader> community
- ◇ Words of advice
- ◇ Un-met needs in our community where HUC may have a role

Meetings were held with:

- ◇ Costen & Associates Insurance and Financial Planning
- ◇ Kensington Art Supply Store
- ◇ Executive Director, Calgary Sexual Health Centre
- ◇ Director of Family and Community Support Services
- ◇ Executive Director, Burns Memorial Fund
- ◇ Executive Director, Distress Centre
- ◇ Calgary Foundation
- ◇ Hillhurst resident & ex-member of community development committee
- ◇ Hillhurst resident & residential realtor
- ◇ Hillhurst resident & business owner (Paul Hardy Designs)
- ◇ Sunnyside resident & city planner
- ◇ Hillhurst resident and Alderman Ward 7 (Druh Farrell)
- ◇ Former HUC member and Hillhurst resident, former Alderman (Bev Longstaff)
- ◇ Owner, Muse Restaurant
- ◇ Employees – Wee Book Inn, Honey Bees, Si Senore

In addition, a sense of the voices among us in our community was gathered through ‘prayer dyad’, perhaps otherwise known as ‘eavesdropping’. Vision team members spent time in the streets and shops of Kensington watching and listening to the fascinating mosaic of people in our midst.

Appendix Three

All meeting notes, community listening transcripts, congregational workshop flip charts, individual or group exercise worksheets and other input data has been retained and is available, on request.

END