

**Mission to build:  
Converging and competing interests over church  
property redevelopment in Vancouver, BC**

**by  
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## **Abstract**

This study explores the converging and competing interests of real estate, urban planning, and congregational interests over church property redevelopment in Vancouver, BC. Using multiple methodologies including historical analysis, document analysis, semi-structured interviews, and a case study, this project provides an analysis of twenty-four church redevelopment projects proposed in Vancouver between 2005 and 2020. While these projects are generally described as “win-win-win”, the purpose of this study is to evaluate this claim of shared benefit. Key findings reveal a trend towards the privatization of community-serving space through a net transfer of land to market residential developments. The market driven approach adopted by most of these projects stand in contrast to values of housing affordability and community benefit articulated by interview participants, raising questions about how congregations can better protect their missional interests through redevelopment. A case study of the Co:Here housing project by Grandview Church provides insight into how mission-driven, non-market church redevelopments might differ from dominant models of church-developer partnerships.

**Keywords:** church redevelopment; Vancouver churches; mission-driven development; affordable housing; social purpose real estate

## Dedication

*Pour ma maman*

*Qui m'apprend à rebâtir*

*Dans un monde changé*

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## List of Acronyms

CHS	Community Housing Sector
CMHC	Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation
COV	City of Vancouver
HRA	Heritage Revitalization Agreement
IAF	Industrial Areas Foundation
MVA	Metro Vancouver Alliance
SFU	Simon Fraser University
TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission

# Chapter 1. Introduction

## 1.1. Project Background

When I first attended an affordable housing research-action team meeting with Metro Vancouver Alliance (MVA)<sup>1</sup>, one of the co-chairs asked those present to share how housing unaffordability impacted our lives. At the time, I was a new graduate student with a part time job at a non-profit. A housemate situation gone bad had recently led me to move into my pastor's tiny spare room. To me, housing unaffordability was a noise, and it shared the pitch of five-in-the-morning toddler cries bursting from the adjacent room. It was shrill. It motivated me to act.

Everyone in the room knew a facet of the housing crisis intimately: the board member of a community association lived in low-income seniors housing; a lay leader worried about her church's future as young families moved to more affordable cities; and a well-housed union member feared that her kids and grandchild would also need to move away. As individuals, we felt powerless to change the situation. We knew that in the past, our institutions had successfully mitigated housing pressures for their members: community associations had advocated for social housing; churches had built housing for seniors and low-income families; labour unions had invested in co-operative housing for workers. That night, in a run-down Anglican rectory, we talked about whether our organizations had the power to do it again.

But our organizations were suffering too. Civil society, “the social organizations, associations and institutions that exist beyond the sphere of direct supervision and control by the state” (Douglass & Friedman, 1998, p. 21), didn't seem to be the countervailing force to state and market forces it had once been (Fukuyama, 2001). Unions doubted whether they could negotiate wage increases that kept up with housing costs. Students disengaged from campus life as they worked part time jobs to make rent. Church attendance was low, building maintenance costs high, and many church leaders questioned whether their congregations could survive another decade. It wasn't

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<sup>1</sup> Metro Vancouver Alliance is a broad based organization whose membership represents a cross section of civil society institutions—including labour unions, faith organizations, community associations, and academic institutions. See [www.metvanalliance.org](http://www.metvanalliance.org).

just individuals who struggled in this housing ‘crisis’<sup>2</sup>. Civil society institutions also seemed to be losing ground (Putnam, 1995).

In many cases, this losing ground was quite literal. Anecdotally, we knew that churches were increasingly selling property to developers. A church leader in the room shared how her congregation had struggled for years to pay maintenance bills for its ageing building. With the end of the congregation’s life in sight, it had begun exploring redevelopment deals. The prices offered were enticing. We had also heard of some churches partnering with developers to finance new or renovated worship space by building market housing on the property. Some were managing to build affordable rental housing. Though this emerging model seemed to enable churches to have an ongoing presence in the neighbourhood, it also seemed to contribute to the growing power of real estate in our cities.

That meeting planted the seed for what would become this research project. Before long, I was granted a MITACS Accelerate Award to work as a research intern with MVA, under the direction of their lead organizer and my faculty supervisor in the Urban Studies Department at SFU. Between September 2018 and May 2019, my role was to work with the housing team to further explore potential for church property redevelopment. It was a strategic project we hoped could lead to affordable housing development while also building the power and capacity for churches to act meaningfully on an urban issue.

## **1.2. Context**

The context for this thesis is Vancouver, British Columbia, a city whose relationship to housing has been dramatically reshaped by unsustainable real estate speculation (Rherrad et al., 2019) and parallel shortages in affordable housing (City of Vancouver, 2018a; Marowits, 2018). As in many global cities, land prices in Vancouver have increased by over 50 percent between 2011 and 2017, “creating vast amounts of increased assets for the wealthy while making housing unaffordable for most households

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<sup>2</sup> I use scare quotes on the word ‘crisis’ to acknowledge the problematic implication that, outside of this moment of ‘crisis’, Canada’s housing system is fully functional. Canada has been in a housing crisis since early colonization days, leading to the ongoing displacement of indigenous peoples from their homes (Thistle, 2017)

not already invested in the market” (Farha, 2017, p. 8). A lack of policy response by all levels of government has contributed to the escalation of housing pressures (Gordon, 2016).

Vancouver is a prime example of how global real estate capital, and the accompanying ideology of neoliberalization, has restructured how urban residents experience housing (Farha, 2017; Gordon, 2016; Rolnik, 2013; Stein, 2019b). Beginning in the 1980s, governments around the world began dismantling welfare provisions for housing, “and [mobilizing] a range of policies intended to extend market discipline, competition and commodification (Brenner and Theodore, 2002)” (Rolnik, 2013, p. 1059). Real estate has become the global “commodity of choice”, with the value of real estate capital representing nearly 60 percent of all global assets in 2017, with 75 percent of those investments in residential real estate (Farha, 2017). Global cities such as Vancouver have been increasingly defined by the speculative movement of financial capital into the real estate residential market.

Housing scholars have discussed the particular role municipal governments have in protecting local homes from further commodification (Farha, 2014; Stein, 2019b), yet most city planning departments tend to contribute to rather than limit possibilities for real estate investments. Stein (2019) uses the term ‘real estate state’ to describe the “political formation in which real estate capital has inordinate influence over the shape of our cities, the parameters of our politics, and the lives we lead” (p. 54). In practice, the real estate state looks like municipalities directing planners to “stoke land markets and enable gentrification... either because [property values] are low and landowners want them higher, or because they are already high and city budgets will fail if they start to fall” (Stein, 2019, p. 55). Increasingly, planning institutions restructure cities to attract global capital at the expense of the use value of urban life (Rolnik, 2013; Stein, 2019a).

In Vancouver, these priorities have been at least somewhat balanced with a modest return of government investments in affordable housing and regulatory policy—evidenced by the National Housing Strategy (Government of Canada, 2017), the Homes for BC plan (Province of British Columbia, 2018), and the Housing Vancouver Strategy (City of Vancouver, 2018a), as well the regional property transfer tax and municipal empty homes tax (Farha, 2017). These reflect the growing public demand for multi-pronged solutions to housing unaffordability.

These dynamics of global real estate frame my inquiry into church property redevelopment. With over a quarter of B.C.'s provincial GDP tied to construction and real estate (Gordon, 2016), it is fair to expect that real estate development will continue to be at the forefront of urban restructuring. I expect this trend will undoubtedly apply to undervalued, under-developed church real estate. Nevertheless, senior governments are reinvesting in affordable housing programs, municipalities are developing new housing policies, and a non-market housing sector is growing in capacity (May, 2020). There may yet be a chance for church redevelopment to contribute to non-commodified, use-value centred development of space by creating either non-market housing or community serving space.

### **1.3. Research Question**

This study's main research question is:

*What has been the interplay between urban planning, real estate, and congregational interests in church property redevelopment in Vancouver, B.C.?*

I am interested in understanding converging or contesting interests over church property because I see struggles over church land as representative of larger power struggles over urban landscapes. Shifts in the urban religious landscape reflect broader changes in the "dominant world-view, group, or ideology" (Hackworth & Gullikson, 2013, p. 74). I see church property as a site of competing self-interests for municipalities, real estate developers, and congregations, who all seek to exercise control over the outcome of church redevelopments.

I adopt a multiple methods approach "to address different facets of a research question, or to address the same question from different perspectives" (Philip, 1998, p. 264). In Chapter 2, I provide a conceptual framework that examines the interests of real estate, municipalities, and congregations in church redevelopment from theoretical perspectives. Chapter 3 offers more details on the research methods I've adopted to empirically examine the degree to which each of these sectors' interests have materialized in Vancouver. Chapter 4 examines church property redevelopment through a historical lens, documenting shifting trends in church led development since the 1960s and detailing types of redevelopment projects that have emerged since the early 2000's.

Chapter 5 uses interview data with church leaders and a case study of a particularly mission-driven, non-market housing project to explore congregational interest through a missional lens. I conclude with a brief discussion of broader implications of my findings in Chapter 6.

My goal is to bring a critical lens to church redevelopment projects by examining how they participate in or reveal larger processes of urban restructuring, which I understand to be moving towards greater degrees of commodification and privatization of space. I make an informed assumption that congregations, as mission-driven organizations, seek to be socially conscious in their redevelopment processes and would choose non-market development if and when feasible (Baugh, 2020; Erdman, 2020; Martin & Ballamingie, 2016; May, 2020; Mian, 2012). Observing that many church redevelopments are financed by the development of commodity housing, I offer a secondary guiding question for this research:

*Are there factors that influence a congregation's likelihood of pursuing mission-driven, non-market development?*

Based on existing research on church redevelopments (Hackworth & Gullikson, 2013; Mian, 2008, 2012), I hypothesize that the degree of clarity a congregation has about its mission, as well as its awareness of broader redevelopment processes and trends, informs the agency with which it pursues non-market development options.

## **1.4. Normative stance**

This study explores landowning congregations' self-interests as they emerge over time in relationship to the self-interests of urban planning and real estate institutions. Ernesto Cortes, co-director of the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF), MVA's international umbrella network, is fond of breaking down the root of the word "interest". *Inter-esse*, a Latin word meaning "to be among and between", points to the interactive nature of self-interests. Similarly, the theory of religious ecology, described in Chapter 2, captures a similar notion: "institutions impact and are impacted by their environment" (Mian, 2008, p. 2154). This study explores how the urban environment impacts a church organization, with a particular interest in understanding processes of changing self-interest at an organizational level.

Property, according to theologian Reinhold Niebuhr (1944), is an instrument of self-interest and therefore an instrument of power. Power is the ability to act. In a city like Vancouver, those who have property have the power to shape it, within provided planning parameters, according to their self-interests. Church property redevelopment, then, is one way that religious congregations have taken note of the power of real estate in their city and sought to harness it for their own self-interest. The dynamic of redevelopment reveals that property is one of the last remaining elements of church's power. It also allows us to see other players' interests in property and power in the city. This research examines the many ways that church property is sought after as an instrument of self-interest.

I take an explicitly counter-neoliberal, anti-commodification normative stance throughout this research project (Madden & Marcuse, 2016; Purcell, 2008; Stein, 2019a). I believe that the privatization of community space, as well as the commodification of housing, should generally be opposed by both urban residents and institutions who are mission-driven and community-oriented. In other words, places that serve the use value of urban residents should be protected from real estate interests (Madden & Marcuse, 2016; Marcuse, 2011, p. 20). That being said, I am not invariably opposed to partnership with the market. Property is being developed for the interest of speculative investors, and I am open for it to be leveraged for the interests of mission-driven community organizations.

I do not pretend to have answers about what a 'good' church redevelopment looks like. While I do believe that there are many potential benefits for both a church and the public in a redevelopment project, I also have a healthy dose of skepticism about the inherent good of redevelopment. In agreement with Friedmann & Douglass (1998), I see civil society, and therefore congregations, as inherently and necessarily "for itself". It is for each individual congregation to weigh the benefits and consequences of redevelopment and evaluate their own motives according to their organizational mission. Urban planning institutions encourage certain types of redevelopments by setting parameters, creating incentives, and providing resources. The real estate sector has its own sets of incentives and constraints. Neither fully dictate what decisions congregations make about church property.

## 1.5. Who cares about church property?

Who cares about what happens with church property? The list, of course, begins with the congregations and denominations that own them. Nine thousand of Canada's 27,000 churches are expected to close in the next ten years (Baugh, 2020). A growing number of British Columbians claim to have no religion, and those who do claim religious affiliation are likely to claim non-Christian faiths (Wilkins-Laflamme, 2017). Religious disaffiliation, along with rising property maintenance costs, creates an urgent incentive for churches to find financial sustainability. Property redevelopment is emerging as solution for churches in many cities where property values are high (Mian, 2008). This project situates property redevelopment as a means of both finding financial sustainability and developing a fresh identity, mission, and form, that can resonate with contemporary urban life (Mian, 2008, 2012).

Non-Christian congregations, along with secular landowning non-profits, may also be interested in church redevelopments. Christian churches have historically represented the largest property holders among faith groups, but this trend is steadily reversing. Synagogues, mosques, temples, and gurdwaras have frequently been the buyers of former church properties (Ritchie, 2015). Congregations that are experiencing growth and acquiring property are in very different positions than churches redeveloping to address decline, making redevelopment a less necessary strategy to their mission. Nevertheless, they may be interested in redevelopment as a way of unlocking new revenue streams or as a means of providing housing for members of their own community (Todd, 2019a, 2019b). Although this study focuses on congregations from the Christian tradition, its findings can extend to other landowning institutions who wish to leverage their property to serve their mission.

Beyond its missional dimensions, church property has attracted the attention of several government and civil society players who seek solutions to the housing 'crisis'. These stakeholders are referred to as the Community Housing Sector (CHS), and their aim is to promote the long-term social impact of non-market housing investments (May, 2020). Examples of CHS initiatives that support church redevelopment include: the Building It Right Toolkit and Workshop series, developed by Vancity Credit Union to inform churches and non-profits about mission-driven development (Vancity Community Foundation, n.d.; Vancity Credit Union & Vancity Community Foundation, 2020); the

provincial Housing Hub started by BC Housing, which helps form partnerships between landowning organizations, funders, and development partners (BC Housing, n.d.); and the Community Housing Research Network, which is funded by Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation and the Social Science and Humanities Council of Canada (May, 2020). The real estate sector and municipalities have their own interests in church property as prospective sites of housing development, which I will not detail here as I explore both in Chapter 2.

## **1.6. On church property and colonialism**

As a settler scholar with roots in the Christian tradition, it is important to me to ground my work in the genesis of church property in Vancouver. Mainline protestant churches played a prominent role in the settlement of Western Canada, a colonization project that relied upon the systematic and legally-sanctioned appropriation of Indigenous peoples' land. Early church property acquisition in Vancouver is complicit with this process. Churches stand on land made available through the dispossession and displacement of Indigenous peoples (Blomley, 2003). This settlement was given legal legitimacy in accordance with liberal notions of property rights. Churches, as major landowners, still benefit from the legal protection of property rights that affords property owners clear, systemic advantages.

To recount the history of church participation in the settlement of Vancouver is a crucial step in decolonizing religious institutions. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (TRC) Calls to Action (2015) directs church parties in the Settlement Agreement to educate their congregations on their role in colonization. One interview participant in this project reminded me that churches are keenly aware of their duty to address colonialism:

Aboriginal people don't need white people to talk for them, and they don't need a formerly white church to make their case. They can do that so effectively. But it is good for other voices in our society to be saying, "Listen. Listen to what the elders are saying. Listen to what the grand chief and council of chiefs are saying." We cannot drop this work. We have a very key role to play in a public way. As a voice. As well as on the ground.

I likewise recognize the importance of churches being proactive agents of reconciliation and decolonization by sharing the stories of church settlement. This particular task is

beyond the scope of this project. However, as questions relating to the church's role in colonization and decolonization are among the most common ones I receive about my research, I offer the following reflection on my project's relevance to decolonization.

Church leaders interviewed in this project expressed strong commitments to reconciliation. They shared many steps their congregations and denominations had taken to build relationships with Indigenous communities. Examples include hiring Indigenous clergy and staff, giving leadership to Indigenous elders in congregations, hosting feasts in honour of residential school survivors, educating community about intergenerational trauma, making financial contributions for reconciliation grants, and standing in solidarity with Indigenous struggles for land rights and environmental justice. One participant suggested that church-built housing should give priority to residential school survivors. I share these examples not with the intent to argue that churches have appropriately responded to the TRC Calls to Action, since it is not up to me to make such a claim. Rather, I share them to illustrate the absence of actions or ideas for future action that question the responsibility of churches to struggle for decolonization as *landowners*. This reflects a broader, mainstream blindness to the role of land and landownership in decolonization work.

In a liberal democracy, property rights are supreme. The legal constructions of property and property rights are central to the colonial project and consistently work towards the dispossession and displacement of indigenous people:

Dispossession and displacement as active projects are very much about land as property. Property is both the point of these struggles and the medium. Struggles over the meanings and moralities of property have been central. Law, in this sense, must be conceived not simply as an instrument of colonial domination but as a means through which colonialism has itself been produced (Blomley, 2003, p. 109).

Since the early days of settlement, churches have bought, owned, developed, sold, and managed property under the protection of this legal system. It is the same system under which governments, public institutions, and private property owners, and corporations buy, own, develop, sell, and manage property. Decolonization requires problematizing all these property rights.

This project is my modest attempt to draw out and problematize the "meanings and moralities of property". While it is certainly important to question what one church-

owned piece of land is and should be through a decolonization lens, I hope to use church property as a starting point to question broader assumptions about the use and purpose of property. It is much easier to imagine individual congregations taking meaningful steps towards decolonization than it is to imagine abolishing the power of real estate capital, which continually dispossesses urban residents, with disproportionately unjust implications for urban indigenous persons. I suggest that meaningful decolonization involves both.

## **Chapter 2. Conceptual Framework**

### **Introduction**

In Chapter 1, I described church property redevelopment as an area of mutual self-interest among the real estate, urban planning, and faith sectors. This chapter applies three groups of scholarly literature to explore what drives these respective interests. I discuss three theoretical frameworks, each of which examines church property from a different perspective. What is the purpose of church property? What are the impacts of churches being sold? What should church redevelopments look like, and what should they accomplish? The answer to these questions depend on who you ask.

The first theoretical framework I discuss looks at the question of church property from a market perspective. This approach applies a market logic to the trend of religious disaffiliation and concludes that secularization implies a declining demand for places of worship. Churches are under-used, under-developed prime real estate and should be reconfigured to yield the highest possible market returns.

The second theoretical framework examines churches from the perspective of city planning departments. Church property, from the city's point of view, contributes to the public benefit by providing a variety of community-serving space and social programming. Mission-oriented, community serving churches are seen as assets that can assist municipalities in meeting planning goals. With municipalities dealing with a growing number of housing and social pressures with limited resources, integrating churches into city planning objectives is a way for cities to pass some of their responsibilities onto community partners.

Finally, I examine the perspective of congregations through the lens of religious ecology theory. This third theoretical framework situates religious institutions within the context of a changing community, allowing us to understand how and why organizational change happens at the congregational level. Property redevelopment has become a way for congregations to adapt to a shifting urban environment. Redevelopment projects do more than provide a new worship space and housing; they also offer an opportunity for the congregation to renew its mission and its role in the surrounding community.

## **2.1. “Highest and best use”: church redevelopment as expression of market demands**

Since the 1960’s, Canada has experienced a persistent decline in rates of religious participation. The trend has been particularly noteworthy among the five protestant denominations once seen as “integral to the nation’s social order”— the United Church of Canada, the Anglican Church of Canada, the Presbyterians, the Baptists, and the Lutherans (Clarke & Macdonald, 2011, p. 512). British Columbia has been at the forefront of religious disaffiliation, with 44% of BC residents reporting “No religion” in the 2011 National Household Survey (Wilkins-Laflamme, 2017). Many churches are closing as a result of this widespread disaffiliation. One estimate suggests that 9,000 of Canada’s 27,000 churches will close in the next ten years (Baugh, 2020). These general observations often lead to an understandable assumption: demand for religious space is on the decline.

The first theoretical understanding of church property redevelopment applies market principles to this shrinking demand for places of worship. Hackworth & Gullikson (2013) have observed that market theory is among the most popular theoretical approaches used to understand secularization. Market theory posits that, under an unregulated religious market, religious entrepreneurialism will eventually allow the religious landscape to reflect religious demand. Thus, in Vancouver, where religious demand is on the decline, market theory would predict the transformation of the religious landscape to reflect a more secular culture.

Among urban geographers, landscape theory leads to a parallel interpretation of the decline of religious space. “Within landscape theory, entities like places of worship are seen as tangible expressions of the cultural realm where they are located (Lewis 1979), and are generally representative of the dominant world-view, group, or ideology (Knox 1982; Goss 1988)” (Hackworth & Gullikson, 2013, p. 74). It follows that the decline of religious space is similarly understood as representative of the dominant secular world-view. These market and landscape perspectives frame the redevelopment of church property as a symbol of the decline of religion, a type of ‘natural’ decay of the religious era and ‘renewal’ of space according to new, secular demands. Such an interpretation invites the question: what replaces religious space as a symbol of Vancouver’s dominant “world-view, group, or ideology”?

According to Blomley (2003), the restructuring of urban space in Vancouver has followed a neoliberal morality best captured in the concept of “highest and best use” (p. 84). “Highest and best use” refers to the market potential a given site could achieve under reasonable (read: unregulated) conditions. The principle is often used to imply that a new development, free from state intervention, would produce the optimal scenario:

Highest and best use... is the ultimate end of a parcel of land, left unchecked. This is not just a prediction, it is a prescription—highest and *best* use, in other words. The highest and best use of urban land is a moral imperative and a necessary expectation. It is inevitable, natural, and beneficial... Urban land is expected to undergo sequential “improvement,” premised on private ownership, in which rents are maximized” (Blomley, 2003, p. 84, italics in original).

This logic frames church buildings as under-used, under-developed, and under-valued space. That church buildings sit empty most of the week while occupying prime real estate is an affront to “highest and best use” logic, which cannot conceive of property that forgoes collecting the highest achievable rents. Seen in this way, underdeveloped church property is not only an opportunity to capitalize on potential rents, it is also a deviation from the hegemonic morality of neoliberal ideology.

Ley & Martin (1993) offer evidence of former Vancouver church properties being captured by market interests. In a study that focused on the post-industrial neighbourhoods of Fairview and Kitsilano, they found that church sales were a sign of parallel trends of secularization and gentrification. Former sites of public worship were sold as neighbourhood demographics shifted. Churches and other sites of working class collective community were replaced by a “public landscape of conviviality and recreation” (Ley & Martin, 1993, p. 228): fitness centres, neighbourhood pubs, restaurants, and services “attendant to the cultivation of social identity” soon characterized these gentrifying neighbourhoods. Though the study’s authors claim these new venues maintain the function of building “community”, they do so at the expense of consumers and to the financial gain of private interests.

In more recent decades, commodity housing has become the ultimate “highest and best use” in post-industrial, neoliberal, and global cities (Blomley, 2003; Madden & Marcuse, 2016; Stein, 2019a). Following the introduction of strata title in British Columbia in 1970, the rise of condominiums has remade Vancouver’s real estate market by dramatically increasing the potential profits of housing development (Harris, 2011). As

I will illustrate in Chapter 4, the majority of church property redevelopment projects now include strata housing as a form of revenue generation, demonstrating that church property is being remade to conform to “highest and best use” standards.

In addition to being criticized for its adherence neoliberal ideologies, the “highest and best use” understanding of church property redevelopment has a few additional shortcomings. Firstly, it minimizes the public value of religious, non-commodified, civil-society space to the public by implying that commodified space provides equivalent if not superior public good. Secondly, it ignores evidence of the ongoing demand for public worship from non-mainline traditions, including growing evangelical denominations and non-western religions (AlSayyad & Massoumi, 2010; Wilkins-Laflamme, 2017). And thirdly, it minimizes the role of planning institutions in redevelopment by assuming that municipalities share the same “highest and best use” interests as real estate players. In summary, the “highest and best use” narrative dismisses non-market, unprofitable contributions to urban life and minimizes the demand for mission-driven use of space.

## **2.2. Partnering with the third sector: church redevelopment as a city planning strategy**

A second theoretical framework for understanding church redevelopment casts religious institutions as third sector actors. The third sector, also known as voluntary, non-profit, or civil society sector, is described by Shield & Evans (1998) as:

... constituting all those “private sector organizations that are prohibited from distributing profits to their stakeholders” (Hirshhorn 1997a: 5). They are organizations that serve the broader “public interests,” that rely heavily upon private donations of money and voluntary labour and that are involved in a high degree of civic engagement (p. 89).

Rather than seeing congregations as units within a declining religious sector, this approach treats religious organizations as social and economic assets that have fulfilled a growing number of functions under neoliberal governance.

A growing reliance on the third sector has been a key part of neoliberal agendas (Shield & Evans, 1998). The “roll-back” of the Keynesian welfare state’s many functions has been paired with an appeal for increased partnership with civil society. These partnerships, which create alternative service delivery options, are discursively hailed as

expressions of “revived voluntarism and a more ‘participatory’ civic culture” (p. 88). Applied to affordable housing and social service programs, the neoliberal agenda has led to diminished state involvement (Purcell, 2008; Suttor, 2016a), leaving the third sector and the market to fill the service gap, either autonomously or through competitively secured partnerships with government (Shield & Evans, 1998). In the neoliberal imagination, this approach is seen to be more resource efficient and believed to provide a higher quality of services.

Municipalities have found themselves on the receiving end of downloaded state function, while also passing on their fair share of downloaded responsibility to local third sector actors (Purcell, 2008; Stein, 2019b). Canadian housing scholar Greg Suttor (2016a) has illustrated how housing programs in Canada have been progressively downloaded from federal, provincial, and municipal governments, while fewer resources have been made available. This has left cities with a growing responsibility to provide affordable housing within their municipality, but without the necessary fiscal resources to do so. According to Stein (2019b), municipalities have responded by relying on the real estate industry to meet housing goals. Affordable housing provision has been increasingly accomplished through market mechanisms, such as inclusionary zoning practices, which provide increased profit opportunities for the real estate sector. This approach has also left local community organizations with a growing role in filling the gap of housing investments—as seen by the number of Vancouver churches that have opened weekly shelters since the rise of street homelessness in the 1980s (Bird, 2008).

The *Housing Vancouver Strategy* (City of Vancouver, 2018a), helps situate Vancouver within these broader trends. The document clearly outlines how the cancellation of provincial and federal housing programs in the 1990s has limited the City’s ability to grow its supply of affordable housing. Yet, housing unaffordability has reached such levels that the municipality must find ways to address these growing pressures, even if with reduced involvement from senior governments. Vancouver’s key strategies include partnership with “all levels of government” and renewed commitment to work with “partners across all sectors, particularly non-profit, co-op, and Indigenous housing partners, as well as new stakeholders” (p. 5). These parallel approaches demonstrate the city’s acknowledgement of its disproportionate housing mandate, which gets translated into further downloading onto the third sector.

Two recent city initiatives exemplify how churches have been identified as third sector assets and incorporated into the City of Vancouver's planning strategies. The first is the *Affordable Housing and Community Space Incentive Program*, which is being developed by the COV's Housing Policy team (M. de Avila Wilton, personal communications, 23 January, 2019). This program supports places of worship, among other partners, to develop affordable housing. The program aims to create development incentives and capacity building resources for affordable housing development. It will also prioritize the renewal of existing community, arts, and cultural space.

Similarly, the *Community Serving Spaces Study* aims to better understand the needs and priorities of places of worship, Legion Halls, ethnic Culture Centres, neighbourhood houses, and other such property owning third sector organizations. 264 of the city's 311 community serving sites are places of worship, with 215 of those being Christian churches (Bird, 2019a). Churches provide often below-market rental space to a wide range of community groups, including Boy Scouts, Girl Guides, performing groups, daycares, out of school programs, English learning programs, community kitchens, shelters, and Alcoholics Anonymous (Baugh, 2020; Bird, 2019b; Erdman, 2020). The study will be used to inform future policies to renew or enhance community serving spaces in Vancouver (M. de Avila Wilton, personal communications, 23 January, 2019; (Bird, 2019a, 2019b). These two city projects reveal that churches are not only seen as potential partners in affordable housing delivery, but also as providers of social services that will need to find new and probably more expensive space if churches continue to close down.

Seen within this broader context, a growing interest in partnering with landowning churches can be understood as an expression of the municipality's dependence on the third sector. Encouraging the third sector to contribute to affordable housing provision can alleviate some of the housing pressures the municipality is facing. Creating policies to retain or renew community serving space is a pre-emptive strategy that keeps social programming in the third sector before demand for lost social services gets redirected towards the municipality (Baugh, 2020; Erdman, 2020). The alternative to these partnerships has the city feeling concerned (Bird, 2019b), since it would mean additional strain on the city's already limited resources to address its housing unaffordability pressures and meet the public's demand for social programming.

More broadly, this strategy of supporting churches can also point to the city's partnerships with real estate. Beyond contributing to affordable housing and social programming supply, this strategy has the added benefit of allowing real estate capital to continue its speculative strategies of profitmaking in the private, commodity housing market (Peck et al., 2013; Stein, 2019b). As Chapter 4 will reveal, most church housing developments are achieved by providing opportunities for real estate developers to make a profit, often resulting in reduced community serving space. Seen in this light, church housing developments are expressions of "roll-with-it neoliberalism", where even neoliberalization's contestations, critiques, and countervailing policies operate within its narrow parameters (Keil, 2009; Peck et al., 2013).

### **2.3. Religious ecology theory: redevelopment as congregational adaptation**

Religious ecology theory, a third theoretical framework, gives religious institutions centre stage in interpreting the redevelopment of church property. According to Mian (2012), religious ecology theory is concerned with how a congregation "affects and is affected by its surrounding environment, which includes not only religiously affiliated relationships but also social, economic, and political associations" (p. 199). With origins in the discipline of congregational studies, the theory accounts for the role of markets and governments in the shifting terrain of religion while focusing on the congregation's relationship with and response to its changing environment (Cimino et al., 2012).

Cimino et al. (2012) have studied a cross-section of religious institutions in New York City, including congregations from Christian, Hindu, and new Asian religious movements representing diverse ethnic backgrounds. They have found that themes of "interdependence, adaptation, cooperation, migration, niche, and culture" (p. 5) distinguish ecologies of faith. As shifting environments put strains on religious congregations, congregations adapt by altering their structures and identities to occupy new niches in their communities. Local coalitions, member networks, denominations, and governmental partnerships are called upon in the process of adaptation (Ammerman, 1997).

Mian (2012) has argued that housing development on church property has been one common adaptive niche for congregations in cities with high property values.

Property redevelopment has allowed congregations to offer a new 'product': new mixed-used developments that often include housing (Mian, 2008). This product allows them to extract resources from their surroundings in the form of membership and financial revenue, which can then be reinvested in the congregation's primary 'product': its mission and social programming. As congregations pursue this goal, they engage existing networks—especially relationships among pastors—and create new relationships with real estate developers, government actors, and non-profits. Redevelopment projects become expressions of the church being reshaped by a shifting environment in a way that affects the surrounding community. The impact on neighbourhoods varies. Some large market developments contribute to neighbourhood displacement, while others provide affordable homes and much needed social programming that offset gentrification.

Evidence of an ecology of faith in Vancouver can be found in a series of local events on the topic of mission-driven housing development. In 2016, Regent College, a Vancouver based theology school, hosted a public event titled "Churches and the Housing Crisis" (Regent Exchange, n.d.), where guest speakers shared experiences developing faith-based housing. In 2019, I worked with Metro Vancouver Alliance to host a public education workshop titled "Redevelopment 101 for Churches", which featured peer-sharing circles on development related issues (Ritchie, 2019). In 2020, Vancity Credit Union hosted tours of the redevelopment at Oakridge Lutheran Church and introduced their Building It Right Workshop series to church leaders (Vancity Credit Union & Vancity Community Foundation, 2020). All three events built on existing networks within the religious sector and strengthened ties with mission-driven community partners. All three promoted property redevelopment as a strategy of congregational adaptation.

A unique strength of religious ecology theory is that it helps integrate congregational mission into understandings of church redevelopment. Rather than framing redevelopment projects as signs of religious decline or as results of social planning policy, religious ecology invites an analysis of the congregation's history, culture, and networks (Cimino et al., 2012, p. 5). This additional analytical layer is particularly useful in understanding the variety of church redevelopment projects. For example, a recent study of four church redevelopments in Vancouver showed that redevelopment projects are not only pursued by churches that are struggling to survive

(Erdman, 2020). This finding contradicts both the market focused and planning-centered frameworks, which both only account for churches that are at risk of closing down. Religious ecology theory, on the other hand, suggests that congregation's motivation to redevelop may be adapting their mission in response to a changing social context, rather than adapting their physical and financial structures in response to changing economic environments. This insight was echoed by Pastor Tim Dickau at the 2016 Regent Exchange event, when he spoke of redevelopment as not only a means to address housing needs but also of reconnecting congregations to their communities and neighbourhoods (Regent Exchange, 2016). "Imagine the change in perception it might bring to the value churches bring in our city", he concluded. Such an encouragement indicates congregations are concerned with more than financial survival. Many are actively seeking to shift their relationships to their surroundings.

Mian's (2012) elaboration on religious ecology theory gives even further prominence to the role of congregational agency. Her case study of Trinity Lutheran Church on Manhattan's Upper West Side stands out as an exception among church property redevelopments. In a city where over seventy churches are involved in redevelopment schemes, Trinity carefully considered joining the trend in order to finance much needed renovations of their church building. After a long visioning process, the congregation decided to engage in a capital campaign rather than redevelop, concluding that partnering with a market developer did not align with their congregational mission. This case study leads Mian to argue, "religious ecology needs to provide more clarification and direction as to the role of individual actors and agency in how and why decisions are made and relationships are established" (2012, p. 217). While congregational agency has not conventionally been considered a significant theme of religious ecologies, several scholars who apply religious ecology frameworks have also called for agency to be further integrated into the theory (Cimino, 2011; Cimino et al., 2012).

As an analytical framework, the theory of religious ecology allows us to consider the role of congregational mission, agency, and networks in determining the outcome of church redevelopments. It also invites us to consider how congregations impact their surroundings. For instance, according to Eisland (2000), church adaptations mimic market principles with limited awareness of their project's broader impact on the surrounding community. Mian (2008) has provided some recommendations for

addressing issues with church redevelopment. For example, she suggests that municipalities should have a greater role in advising congregations in their redevelopment processes. In other words, her analysis has revealed the need to strengthen relationships between congregations and urban planning institutions. This recommendation provides one example of how religious ecology theory might inform practical recommendations.

## **Conclusion**

This conceptual framework has considered church redevelopment from the perspective of real estate, municipal, or congregational interests. In each of the theoretical frameworks provided, I have deliberately brought forth critiques of the neoliberalization of the city, property, and housing, particularly through the expansion of commodity housing markets. Peck et al. (2013) caution that “there is always more going on than neoliberalism; there are always other active sources and forces of regulatory change; there are always countervailing interests, pressures and visions” (p. 1093). In concluding this conceptual exercise, I want to temper this critique with some more hopeful, or at least productive, perspectives of church redevelopment.

The concept of non-reformist reform is often used to balance a critique of neoliberalization with the development of practical alternatives (Fainstein, 2010). Whereas cities have a limited ability to change global policy and market contexts, they can operate within existing frameworks to create opportunities for incremental change, which in turn lead to more radical change over time. Madden & Marcuse (2016) support wide local experimentation with housing development as long as it falls under the overarching goal of creating non-commodified housing. Any step that challenges homeownership and undercuts the dominance of the private market in housing is a step towards the decommodification of housing. Concretely, rental tenure and “non-private-profit oriented” housing development reinforce the use value of housing (Marcuse, 2011, p. 227).

Church led housing developments that provide rental tenure options and model the participation of non-market interests in housing development can be viewed as such local experiments in decommodification. Despite partnering with private real estate developers, these developments are a step of non-reformist reform. In the short term,

such projects may provide some much-needed affordable housing units or non-ownership tenure. They may also encourage other non-market actors to participate in housing solutions. In the long term, they may lead to local policies that facilitate more experimentations with non-commodified housing.

This latter perspective restores a meaningful sense of agency and autonomy to church congregations that is lost in neoliberal critiques of real estate interests and state-downloaded responsibility. Civil society scholars have argued that localized, civil society led solutions to local problems resist the influence of globalized, uniform neoliberal priorities that shape cities (Friedman, 1998; Keil, 2009; Kretzmann & Mcknight, 1996). As a civil society organization, a congregation acts “for itself”. It stands in opposition to the state as well as to the real estate interests with its own sense of mission, goals, and priorities (Douglass & Friedman, 1998). The varied and fragmented goals of civil society restore diversity of perspective and ideas to the local landscape and provides alternative narratives about belonging to and participating in society (Holston, 1998). By supporting church organizations’ participation in housing and social service provision, the COV, and possibly local real estate partners, might also be seen as protecting local interests over the global agenda of real estate capital.

## Chapter 3. Methodology

### 3.1. Research process

This research project took a multiple-methods, non-linear route to explore multiple players' interests in church property redevelopment. I used data from semi-structured interviews, publicly available primary documents, and secondary sources such as academic literature, news articles, online blogs, and videos. My analytical methods were qualitative and inductive, involving several "back-and-forths" between research question, data collection, and analysis (Philip, 1998). This multi-methods approach is summarized as a process:

...in which a number of complementary methods are employed to address different facets of a research question, or to address the same question from different perspectives. Different multiple methods could be used at different times during a research project, and perhaps focus upon different places and different research subjects" (Philip, 1998, p. 264).

Accordingly, the different rounds of data collection and analysis in this project use different types of data to explore church property redevelopment from different perspectives. The rationale for each of these can best be shared by recounting the progression of the project through these rounds of inquiry.

I began with the interests of congregations. During my MITACS research internship with the Metro Vancouver Alliance, I conducted a community-based, participatory research project on church redevelopment. This initial research project provided me with baseline data from field experience and semi-structured interviews. I obtained ethics approval and permission from interview participants to conduct a secondary analysis of these interviews for this master's thesis. This interview data revealed rich content about the dimensions of mission and congregational agency in redevelopment. Interviews provided the primary data for examining redevelopment from the congregational perspective.

Other themes in the interviews invited further analysis beyond the congregational perspective. Several participants made references to a historical context of church involvement in housing, which seemed significant to current engagement with property and housing. In addition, I was intrigued by themes relating to the roles of real estate

developers and urban planning departments. Findings from these interviews sparked new questions about how present experiences of congregations are “influenced by broader historical, geographical, and structural contexts” (Knigge & Cope, 2006, p. 2025). I wanted to incorporate “human agency and social structures, both small-scale and large-scale phenomena, and both specific instances and broader trends” (Knigge & Cope, 2006, p. 2025).

Consequently, the second round of data collection focused on providing a historical, economic, and political context for church property and housing development. In order to construct the history presented in the first part of Chapter 4, I conducted a review of secondary source material covering the involvement of Christian churches and non-profits in housing since the 1960s. This process of illustrating trends in property and housing involved examining reports (Bird, 2008) and website posts (Ritchie, 2015; Terra Housing Consultants, n.d.). Whenever possible I corroborated findings from these sources by cross-referencing them with the websites of faith-based housing organizations involved. I situated this history within the broader contexts of Canadian housing policy and the decline of church attendance in Canada. The methods for this section are fairly straightforward secondary research, and relevant sections in this thesis cite appropriate references, so I will not provide an in-depth account of my analysis in this chapter. I mention it here only to illustrate the progression of my analysis and account for how I have attempted to provide context of the historical and structural structures that have shaped trends in church property observable today.

My third round of data collection and analysis involved providing a broader and current snapshot of trends in church property. Data used in this phase predominantly came from publicly available rezoning and development documents on the City of Vancouver Website. I collected documentation about church redevelopment projects I already knew about and reviewed news articles to identify the rest of the projects. I then created a typology of projects as an analysis tool. The typology identifies similarities and differences in church redevelopment projects based on types of project partnerships. While there are many differences between church projects, overall similarities inform my interpretation of how real estate and urban planning interests shape the outcomes of these projects. This large-scale perspective of church property redevelopment allows me to situate the particular instances of congregational experience within broader trends of real estate and urban planning.

My fourth round of analysis involved going back to interview data and reflecting on initial themes in relation to broader contexts. This process of comparing insights highlighted an anomaly among Vancouver church redevelopment projects, the Co:Here housing development built by Grandview Calvary Baptist Church<sup>3</sup>. While this project already stood out in the first round of interview analysis—for example, it was the only project undertaken by a large, thriving congregation with a significantly younger demographic; and the project did not involve financing any upgrades to the church sanctuary—the historical analysis and typology confirmed the uniqueness of this project. This “specific instance” called for more detailed case study to unpack how it complemented or contradicted some of the themes already explored.

As my research question suggests, my interest is in examining the “interplay” of various interests in church redevelopment, and I do this by examining the “interplay” of various forms of data. This analytical process was inductive in that it extended thematic analysis across the multiple methods used. It was also deductive in attempting to relate those themes to the theoretical frameworks presented in Chapter 2. In this analysis, I have sought validity and reliability “by conducting iterative analyses, seeking negative or contradictory examples, seeking confirmatory data through methodological triangulation, and providing supporting examples for conclusions drawn” (Julien, 2012, p. 3).

## **3.2. Data collection**

### **3.2.1. Semi-structured interviews**

During my research internship with the MVA, I conducted nine semi-structured interviews with MVA members. The participants in these interviews were recruited through references made by MVA’s lead organizer and by snowball sampling. Interview participants came from a variety of organizations. Most were either lay leaders or clergy from mainline protestant faith traditions, including Anglican, Presbyterian, Lutheran, and Baptist denominations. Two were involved with faith-based affordable housing societies. Another two represented labour unions, and these were excluded from the present study given its focus on faith congregations.

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<sup>3</sup> Grandview Calvary Baptist Church has recently changed its name to Grandview Church. I will use this shorter name moving forward.

**Table 1. Interview participants**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Organization</b>
Allen Aicken	Social Justice Action Committee, Presbyterian Church of Canada
Gail Berger	Gloria Dei Lutheran Church
Tellison Glover	Anglican Diocese of New Westminster
Matthew Johnson	St James' Anglican Church
Margaret Marquardt	Eco-justice Unit of the Diocese of New Westminster (formerly with St Margaret's Anglican Church)
Jeanette Moss	Salsbury Community Association & Grandview Calvary Baptist Church
Joan Seidl	127 Society for Housing

The primary goal of the interviews was to identify participants' organization's values and experiences with regards to housing issues. Interviews took place in public places or at participants' workplaces in late 2018. Conversation lengths ranged from thirty minutes to one hour and thirty minutes. I used a brief verbal questionnaire to begin the interview, followed by a semi-structured question guide. Most interviews deviated from the question guide significantly as participants were encouraged to explore other topics according to their experiences and interests. These deviations provided rich content that spoke to the present study's research question, mainly themes regarding congregational mission and development goals.

With the additional consent of participants, interviews were fully recorded and securely stored on SFU Vault. Interviewees were informed of my intention to use interview files for my thesis project, and they gave me permission to recontact them in the future for secondary consent. Before contacting participants for their secondary consent, I obtained written permission from the Principal Investigator of the initial study to use the audio recordings of interviews. I also received ethics approval from the Office of Research Ethics at SFU to recontact participants based on their initial consent. All participants agreed for their interviews to be used for this thesis, and two offered updated information or clarification of their initial comments. In providing secondary consent, participants were also given a chance to consent to the disclosure of their names and affiliated organizations.

### **3.2.2. Documentation**

I began my analysis of recent Vancouver church redevelopments by creating an inventory of projects that had made applications to the City of Vancouver for rezoning

and redevelopment permits between 2006-2020. My time with MVA had made me aware of about a dozen church redevelopment projects. I supplemented this knowledge by searching the Canadian Newstream Database and local online publications for articles about other development projects. I then searched the City of Vancouver website for documentation relating to all these projects, including rezoning and redevelopment applications and by-law amendments. Appendix A provides a complete inventory of church redevelopment projects I reviewed, along with sources used in my analysis. These public documents provided me with data about the project timelines and partners, as well as public worship space, proposed housing units and tenures, and additional ancillary space. News media provided additional descriptive information about the projects and sometimes offered insights about how the public perceived the projects. I used Microsoft Excel to keep track of all the data and sources relating to each project.

At the time I began compiling the inventory, there was no existing exhaustive list of church redevelopment projects in Vancouver. I had no way of verifying how comprehensive my inventory was. Towards the end of my project, I benefited by another inventory produced by Erdman (2020). I compared his inventory with mine and found that they were almost identical. His inventory only had one church project I had missed in my research. My inventory included a few earlier projects than his and a few other projects that have been publicly announced but have yet to submit rezoning applications to the City. Overall, Erdman's (2020) research increased my confidence in the reliability and replicability of my own methods.

### **3.3. Data analysis**

My general analytical approach for all the data I collected was content analysis (Julien, 2012). I adopted an inductive and iterative process of creating codes and themes. As my data expanded with successive rounds of data collection and analysis, I reflected on themes that were consistent across all data, such as partnerships and housing. I also paid attention to inconsistencies. Themes such as mission and leadership came up in interviews but were not present in other data. I treated all my raw data, whether interview transcripts, documents, news articles, or videos, as texts and applied a similar approach to analyzing these (Aitken, 2005; Prior, 2008). This approach helped me to compare data from interviews, public documents, and media sources with themes from scholarly literature.

### **3.3.1. Interview thematic coding and analysis**

I began my analysis by transcribing audio-recordings of interviews verbatim into Microsoft Word. It had been several months since I had conducted the interviews, so this step offered me an opportunity to refamiliarize myself with the content and identify initial themes. I then proceeded to develop initial codes and collected statements that referred to similar themes together for comparison. I began writing analytical memos that helped me reflect on themes and how they relate to one another. I used these memos to write initial drafts summarizing interview findings. Later, I came to treat this initial draft material more as a source of analytical memos, and I referred to these to relate initial themes to insights emerging from the broader data.

### **3.3.2. Creating a typology**

In order to analyze the data I had collected from documents about church redevelopments, I chose to create a typology. Classifying this data helped me to describe projects, reduce complexity, identify similarities between projects, and examine differences (Bailey, 1994). According to Bailey (1994), the usefulness of a typology depends on “the ability to ascertain the key or fundamental characteristics on which the classification is to be based” (p.3). There are a many ways that I might have classified the data. I experimented with re-organizing data in my Excel spreadsheet based on many variables, including partnership type, building structure and design, housing type, ancillary uses, relevant planning influences, and location. In the end, I chose to classify developments by the types of partnerships.

I chose the criteria of partnership for two main reasons. The first reason is quite practical, in that this classification criteria fulfilled the analytical requirement to “minimize within-group variance, while maximizing between-group variance” (Bailey, 1994, p. 2). I found other groupings had too much variation within types. For example, grouping projects by the criteria of housing tenure and affordability, as done by Mian (2008) in her typology of New York City based church redevelopments, yielded categories that had very little similarities between them. Private real estate developers and church partnerships with non-profits appeared equally in affordable rental, market rental, and market strata tenure types. This observation let me to move on to other classification criteria that provided more analytical meaning.

Second, I wished to account for a common criticism of typologies, which claims that they are “merely descriptive” or “pre-theoretical” (Bailey, 1994). I created a typology that is informed by the theoretical framework provided in Chapter 2, in that it puts the respective players of congregation, planning institutions, and real estate at the centre of inquiry. This is the same theoretical framework that informs my research question, and my intent is that this typology would allow me to inform further theoretical analysis.

### **3.3.3. Co:Here Case-study**

In order to create a more in-depth case study of the Grandview Church congregation and the Co:Here housing project, I sought out additional sources to the initial interview, planning documents, and news articles I already had. For background on the congregation, I consulted a book authored by the congregation’s lead pastor, Tim Dickau (2011), which is based on interviews with congregants he conducted for his doctoral research. Videos that shared the story of the Co:Here development were available online, and I analyzed the spoken content of these videos to round out this case study. One video, created for promotional uses by the Co:Here Foundation, edits the many interviewees’ comments and stories to purposefully highlight Co:Here’s vision (*The Co:Here Story*, 2020). The other is an unedited video of a public talk but also intended to promote Grandview Church’s perspectives on housing (Regent Exchange, 2016).

While these sources are limited, I chose to confine my analysis to them for a few reasons. Firstly, conducting new interviews so late in the study would have added significant time to my research—I would have needed ethics approval to recruit new participants to the study; Grandview Church leadership was undergoing a transition; and I was aware that many church leaders were under significant strain due to COVID-19. I also found that the stories shared in all these sources were very consistent and matched the stories I had been told informally by people connected to the project, so I had little reason to believe that additional interviews would provide contradictory stories. I have attempted to minimize bias in this case study by cross-referencing the details shared in these stories with the formal project documents made public through the rezoning process (City of Vancouver, n.d.-; Sundberg & Suttor-Doerksen, 2011). I am also grateful to Jeannette Moss, the initial participant from Co:Here, who agreed to review the case study for accuracy.

## Chapter 4. Church property and housing in context

### Introduction

In 2019, the B.C. Assessment Authority counted 323 religious properties, excluding cemeteries, in the City of Vancouver—including churches, mosques, gurdwaras, synagogues, and temples (Todd, 2019a). The total assessment of these properties in 2019 exceeded \$3.4 billion. The Vancouver Charter provides tax exemptions to “churches owned and occupied by religious organizations, and in use for the public worship of God”<sup>4</sup> (City of Vancouver, 2019). Therefore, each year, the City of Vancouver exempts a portion of religious property value from property taxes. In 2018, more than \$2.3 billion of church property was exempt from taxes, representing over \$3 million of forgone tax revenue for the City of Vancouver (City of Vancouver, 2019). This figure was up from \$2 billion in value and \$2.7 million of forgone tax in 2017 (City of Vancouver, 2018b).

These numbers prompt several observations. First, places of worship hold a significant stock of property in a city where property is scarce and valuable. Second, the value of that property is growing rapidly, making it a dynamic asset for the congregations that own them. And third, while not governed by public authorities, church property is legally treated as a semi-public institution. This public investment in religious institutions indicates that, at least at the time that the Vancouver Charter was written, churches were assumed to provide public benefit of comparable value to other tax-exempt institutions—including crown lands, hospitals, charitable institutions, and public schools. Such observations invite questions about the historical significance of church property in Vancouver’s urban landscape. This chapter recounts the history of church property in Vancouver with a special focus on its role in the development of housing. As we will see, the story of church-built housing is intimately linked to the changing influence of churches as urban institutions.

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<sup>4</sup> While this legal definition of a church includes non-Christian religious institutions, my analysis is limited to churches from Christian denominations. Unless otherwise specified, the reader may assume that the use of the word “church” going forward refers exclusively to Christian churches. See Chapter 1 for the rationale behind this scope.

This chapter addresses my primary research question: What has been the interplay between urban planning, real estate, and congregational interests in church property redevelopment in Vancouver, B.C.? In the first part of the chapter, I review the factors that enabled large-scale involvement of churches in housing development. I begin by examining the overlap between the post-war boom of church property acquisition with the development of the welfare state and ensuing public housing policy. I then explore how urban gentrification and secularization materialized in declining church memberships and trends towards privatization of church property. I outline how the neoliberalization of housing governance involved governments withdrawing from affordable housing delivery and increased planning and market incentives to redevelop church property to align with “highest and best use” standards (Baugh, 2020). A sort of existential crisis now haunts many congregations, putting into question their value as urban institutions. Due to the scarcity and high value of property in a global city like Vancouver, property redevelopment offers congregations an opportunity to quite literally re-formulate their presence in the city. This sets the stage for the market models and non-market innovations of church redevelopment that have emerged in the past several years.

In the second part of this chapter, I analyze housing developments on church property in Vancouver since 2006. I find that the real estate sector has replaced public institutions as the main redevelopment partners of churches. Urban planning interests are exercised through localized plans and development incentives. While this new arrangement has allowed many congregations to upgrade their facilities, I find an overall net transfer of church property towards the private real estate partners and a resulting densification of commodity housing on former church land. Some projects offer rental tenure and a few offer below-market rents. Both are enabled by city development incentives.

## **4.1. Historical overview of church property development**

### **4.1.1. The rise of public housing**

The years that followed the Depression and World War II in Canada saw a notable growth in Church attendance and construction (Noll, 2006). This postwar boom brought large groups of immigrants to Canada, a great majority of which came from

European countries with majority Christian populations (Stackhouse, 2018). This period was also characterized by rapidly expanding wealth, and churches “shared fully in the apparent buoyancy” (Noll 2006, p. 256). For instance, between 1945 and 1965, the United Church of Canada constructed over 1500 churches. Churches were growing, acquiring property, and constructing new buildings. Church historians have argued that this postwar boom had more to do with “the cohesive nationalism of the war effort and the search for normalcy during the postwar economic expansion” (Noll, 2006, p. 256) than any particular initiative on the part of the churches. Regardless of the cause, this was a period of abundant growth for Canadian churches that translated into significant property acquisition.

This period of postwar abundance also led to new Canadian housing policies that would result in over fifty years of federally funded affordable housing development (Suttor, 2016b). With the creation of CMHC in 1946 and the amendment of the National Housing Act in 1949, the federal government began financing affordable housing projects across the country. Between 1965 and 1973, a period Suttor (2016) calls the heyday of Canadian public housing, the federal government was responsible for 16,000 units of public, non-profit, and cooperative housing. Suttor (2016) describes the climate of public opinion in the postwar economic boom as largely supportive of the expansion of the welfare state. Unlike universal programs like health care, housing was one of many welfare programs intended to meet the basic needs of the “truly needy” without compromising the primary housing system’s emphasis on growing private home-ownership (Hulchanski, 2006, p. 239). By the early 1970s, the costs of home ownership had more than doubled in a decade. Ongoing public pressure for federal housing investments led to peak federal housing investments over the next two decades.

Suttor (2016a) refers to the years between 1974 and 1993 as the ‘non-profit decades’ of Canadian social housing delivery. While federal expenditures on social housing continued to grow in this period, the majority of units were built and managed through partnerships with co-operatives, municipalities, non-profits, and community groups. By 1978, the federal government stopped funding public housing, and new social housing unit production only occurred through partnerships. The largest share of new units was developed by community-based non-profit bodies. This is where churches would come in.

Churches were well positioned to partner with government in the delivery of the new housing programs of the 1970s. The 1971 Census recorded the peak level of affiliation for the United, Anglican, Presbyterian, and Lutheran Churches (Clarke & Macdonald, 2011). Churches also benefited from their large amounts of property and an abundance of resources. With federal financing available for housing development with non-profit partners, many church denominations, and even individual congregations, sponsored new faith-based, non-profit housing societies to take advantage of the opportunity. Table 2 provides a few examples of faith-based non-profit housing societies that can trace their origins to this non-profit decade in Canadian affordable housing policy.

Christian housing developed in the non-profit decades reflects compatibility between church and state priorities. An “Inventory of Lower Mainland Christian Housing Providers” (Bird, 2008) shows that most of the faith-based housing units in the region were built by non-profits. The inventory counts 3,267 units of faith-based housing in Vancouver, including a mix of shelter beds, bachelor suites, and one-, two-, and three-bedroom units. In alignment with Canadian housing policy to prioritize the “deserving poor” (Hulchanski, 2006; Suttor, 2016a), the majority of the units house people with special needs or disabilities or low-income seniors and families. This priority was compatible with the social gospel tradition shared by many denominations that nurtured values for caring for the poor— the “truly needy” that public housing programs targeted. When the 1980s brought a rising concern for the emerging problem of street homelessness, housing for the homeless also quickly rose as a shared priority between government and churches. Even when public funding for housing development became less available, many churches maintained their commitment to housing issues by opening weekly homeless shelters in their church space. Thus the inventory includes weekly shelter beds provided by several church congregations.

**Table 2. Examples of the faith-based non-profit model. Adapted from Bird (2008)**

<b>Non-profit society</b>	<b>Affiliation (* = congregation)</b>	<b>Number of units</b>	<b>Year formed</b>
Baptist Housing Ministries	Fellowship of Evangelical Baptist Churches	533	1964
Columbus Charities Association	Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Vancouver	176	1965
127 Society for Housing	Christ Church Cathedral*/Anglican Diocese of New Westminster	255	1981
First United Church Social Housing Society	First United Church*	57	1981
More Than a Roof Housing Society	Mennonite Central Committee of BC	172	1984
Lutheran Manor	Spirit of Life Lutheran Church*	49	1976

In the 1980s and 1990s, as public housing funding began to slow down, a handful of congregations experimented with land leasing as another model of affordable housing delivery. Under this model, congregations leased their excess land, such as a parking lot, to a secular non-profit housing society which in turn negotiated funding and operating agreements with public funders like CMHC or BC Housing. Leasing made the projects more affordable for both non-profit and government partners. Table 3 offers some example of Vancouver based projects developed under this approach. These early projects of housing development on congregationally owned land can be seen as precursors to congregation-led redevelopment projects. They provide precedents for congregational level involvement in housing development that offered both social and financial advantages. Socially, congregants could meet new neighbours who benefited directly from the church's goodwill. Financially, the congregation received land lease fees that, though nominal compared to the market rates today's models can generate, could help bolster congregational budgets.

**Table 3. Examples of the church land lease model. Adapted from Terra Housing Consultants (n.d.)**

<b>Project</b>	<b>Church</b>	<b>Non-profit housing society</b>	<b>Year</b>
Cooper's Place	St James' Anglican Church	City Centre Care Society	1983
First Lutheran Court	First Lutheran Church	HFBC Housing Foundation	1992
Wilson Heights Manor	Wilson Heights United Church	HFBC Housing Foundation	1992
Chinese United Church Lodge	Chinese United Church & Chown Memorial United Church	CUC Housing Society	1993
St Margaret's Apartments	St Margaret's Anglican Church	Coast Foundation Society	1995
St George's Place	St George Anglican	St George's Place Society	1999

In summary, faith-based development starting in the postwar and until the 1990s represents a confluence of church and state priorities and broader societal endorsement of welfare provision. Mian (2012) summarizes church property development in the postwar welfare years as “a social response to the rising welfare needs of urban residents” (p. 199). In other words, the involvement of churches in housing provision during this period emerged from the surplus of church resources in land, money, and human capacity, responding to “the decline of urban neighbourhoods, a rise in poverty, and the need for affordable housing” (Mian, 2012, pp. 199–200). Further, it was made possible by large federal and provincial government investments in public housing, which experienced major cutbacks in the 1990s and have since seen only modest re-expansions (Suttor, 2016a).

#### **4.1.2. Losing religious ground**

Churches had enjoyed significant political capital throughout the postwar period, but their influence over both policy and culture was gradually muted as the welfare state continued its expansion. For much of the twentieth century, Canadian churches had enacted a theology that integrated private and public expressions of faith, leading to social policy advocacy in areas such as education, health care, and housing. According to Noll (2006), the state’s adoption of many social gospel elements left the church “with little to offer by way of specific Christian content in the radically transformed conditions of the 1960s, when Canadian governments acted far more effectively than the churches in guaranteeing personal welfare” (p. 267). With their political agenda redundant, churches began emphasizing private dimensions of faith, such as family life values or individual spiritual practices (Christie, 2002).

There is, of course, much more to the story of church decline than a decline of political significance. Canadian church historians posit that changing immigration quotas favoring populations from non-Christian religions (Bibby, 2011) and cultural leanings towards individualism (Hay, 2014) have played their role in the rapid decline of church attendance. In 1961, one-half of one percent of Canadians claimed not to be attached to a religious organization. That figure was 4.3 percent in 1971 and 16.2 percent in 2001 (Noll, 2006). Canadian weekly church attendance rates were close to two in three prior to 1960, but by the year 2000, that number had dropped to one in four (Bibby, 2002). In

Vancouver, the religious disaffiliation rate between the 1971 and 1981 censuses was 23 percent, compared with a metropolitan mean of 8 percent (Ley & Martin, 1993).

Succumbing to high rates of disaffiliation, many churches throughout Vancouver have sold property. Many congregations followed their suburbanizing memberships outside of the city. Some merged with like-minded congregations, leaving unoccupied buildings. Other congregations disbanded and remaining members scattered among surviving churches. In all of these scenarios, church buildings went up for sale. What has happened to these properties? Three trends can be identified: redevelopment into a commercial or retail space, redevelopment into housing, or ongoing use by another faith group.

The first trend, redevelopment into a commercial or retail space, reflects the broader context of neighbourhood change that accompanies church decline. In a study specific to the Fairview and Kitsilano neighbourhoods of Vancouver, Ley & Martin (1993) linked the gentrification of these two post-industrial neighbourhoods with secularization. They note that the transition from a working-class majority to a prominence of young professionals altered the neighbourhood's religious landscape. Churches and other sites of working class collective community were replaced by a "public landscape of conviviality and recreation" (Ley & Martin, 1993, p. 228): fitness centres, neighbourhood pubs, restaurants, and services "attendant to the cultivation of social identity" soon characterized these gentrifying neighbourhoods. These new sites of community and identity cultivation differ from religious institutions in that they rely on private consumption. They are accountable to the community to the degree that residents vote with their wallet. Overall, they represent the trajectory towards the privatization of neighbourhood commons.

The second outcome for sold church property has been redevelopment into housing. In 2015, Flyn Ritchie, who curates the website Church for Vancouver, attempted to document church sales that had taken place in Vancouver since the compilation of the *Christian Info Resource Directory* in 1989 (Ritchie, 2015). Out of 21 churches originally in the directory that are no longer owned by Christian groups, thirteen churches have been converted into some form of housing development. There is cause to believe that this trend extends beyond Vancouver, as Rav Rampuri and Leonardo DiFrancesco, known as the "Holy Realtors" of the Lower Mainland, have been cited as

claiming to have sold 157 church properties in the past two decades—some to other faith groups and some to market developers (O’Brien et al., 2017). Real estate developers wishing to capitalize on the conversion of church property into commodity housing have either transformed heritage church buildings into condominiums or built entirely new structures. The latter option will be discussed in the second part of this chapter.

The former option is known as adaptive re-use. This practice restores “redundant” churches into profitable real estate as they are refurbished into unique urban lofts (Lynch, 2016). Lynch (2016) has argued that the remaking of church buildings into private lofts represent “a novel materiality of secularism in the post-secular city” (p. 855) which cater to the interests of “affluent urbanites, conservation-minded city managers, and specialty developers”. Counting 26 church loft conversion projects in Toronto, Lynch (2016) argues that the “growing cachet” of church lofts contributes to the recolonization of post-industrial inner cities by new-middle class gentrifies. These projects protect the outer structure of heritage buildings while also allowing real estate interests to commodify religious space.

Table 4 notes examples of church adaptive re-use in Vancouver, though this model has seen markedly less uptake in Vancouver than Toronto. This may be due to the particularly large number of old churches and the political power of heritage preservation groups in Toronto (Hackworth & Gullikson, 2013; Lynch, 2016). As a younger city, Vancouver may have fewer heritage churches to protect. It may also be due to the complexity and risk involved in restoring old buildings (Hackworth & Gullikson, 2013), especially given expensive seismic upgrades required in earthquake-prone Vancouver. Thirdly, it may be that more recent church redevelopment models explored later in this chapter have found ways to leverage high property values to retain the worship function of heritage churches.

**Table 4. Examples of adaptive re-use in Vancouver between 1989-2015. Adapted from Ritchie (2015)**

<b>Church Name</b>	<b>Address</b>
African Fountain Chapel/ Basel Hakka Lutheran Church	823 Jackson Ave
Associated Presbyterian Church	3092 Fraser Street
Mount Pleasant Presbyterian Church/ Evangelistic Tabernacle	85 East 10 <sup>th</sup> Ave

The final outcome of church property sale may also be thought of as a form of adaptive re-use, though one that maintains the ongoing worship function of church space. According to Ritchie's (2015) scan of sold churches, six have been bought by other faith organizations: three Buddhist temples, a mosque, a school of Sufism, a synagogue, and a gurdwara. A seventh, St James United Church, is now the secular St James Community Square. These are listed in Table 5. Evidence of the growing presence of non-Christian faiths lend validity to post-secular theories, which argue that spiritual landscapes are constantly shifting rather than experiencing secularization (AlSayyad & Massoumi, 2010). It also points to an ongoing need for places of worship to in the urban landscape despite the decline of Christian institutions.

**Table 5. Churches sold to non-Christian community groups between 1989-2015. Adapted from Ritchie (2015)**

<b>Church Name</b>	<b>Address</b>	<b>New purpose</b>
Christian Apostolic Church	6025 St George St	Bao Lam Buddhist Association
Concordia Lutheran Church	3496 East Hastings St	Providence Maitreya Temple
Full Gospel Assembly	140 Esmond Ave	M.T.O. Shah Maghsoudi School of Sufism
Grace Chinese Mennonite Church	1659 East 10th Ave	Masjid Omar Al-Farooq Mosque
Highland Church	710 10th Ave	Temple Or Shalom
Prince of Peace Lutheran Church	514 Keefer St	P.T.T. Buddhist Society
St. Jame's United Church	3214 West 10th Ave	St. James Community Square
St. Luke's Anglican Church	7749 Prince Edward St	Gurdwara Sahib Khalsa Darbar

### **4.1.3. Urban church: making a comeback?**

In response to this loss of urban ground, many churches have renewed their commitment to the city through a place-based theology. Almost as soon as churches began suburbanizing, church scholars began producing a wealth of theological texts and church practitioner resources that focus on urban mission. An annotated bibliography compiled by Stockwell (1992) includes over 150 academic resources on topics related to urban mission and social justice, which cover a breadth of topics: secular and faith-based perspectives on the city, historical and theological perspectives on urban issues, and ministry guides for urban contexts. The majority of the entries were published in the 1980s and 1990s, indicating that a surge of interest in urban issues accompanied the trends of urban church decline and suburbanization. Hankins & Walter (2012) offer a more recent example of a place-based urban mission. They describe the model of

“gentrification with justice” which calls for a religious middle class to relocate to and “re-neighbour”, urban neighbourhoods.

This urban focus characterizes several Vancouver congregations that have adopted parish or neighbourhood models of ministry. Among landowning congregations, examples include Grandview Church, whose lead pastor attributes his congregation’s renewal, in part, to their parish model of ministry (Regent Exchange, 2016) and First Baptist Church, which, according to Operating Committee Member Fred Liebich, sees its urban location as an instrumental part of its mission (Baugh, 2020). But the urban congregation model extends to more recent church startups. Stirk (2019b) observes a sharp increase in new church ‘plants’ in Vancouver’s Downtown over recent decades. He notes that there were 9 churches in Vancouver’s downtown peninsula in 1988, 12 in 2006, and 28 in 2015. Beyond the downtown, in Kitsilano, another recent church startup, Christ City Church Kitsilano, offers a Mennonite Bretheren take on “parish-like”, “neighbourhood churches” (Stirk, 2017a).

While some congregations are forced to close their doors and sell their properties, aspiring neighbourhood churches are struggling to find places to meet. “Compounding the lack of rental space is a declining stock of disused older church buildings. Once they’re sold, they’re usually either torn down to make way for a new development [or] turned into multiple residences,” writes Stirk (2019a). “Only rarely is a new church able to take over the property”. Finding a building to meet in is a consistent barrier to the establishment and growth of these neighbourhood focused church ‘plants’. Instead of acquiring property, churches rent space in movie theaters, universities, and community centres. Not having a building may open up more financial freedom but it also contradicts the place-based mission of these churches.

An anecdote from my ethnographic field work serves as a strong cautionary tale for churches considering selling property. When I met with Pastor Greg<sup>5</sup>, he was about a year into his new role as the English congregation pastor in a multi-ethnic church. He shared how the congregation had recently finished a visioning process. Their new vision was to become a ‘living room’ for their neighbourhood. The vision came with ideas to redesign their space to better act as a community centre and possibly provide affordable

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<sup>5</sup> Name has been changed for confidentiality.

homes for seniors in the neighbourhood. However, this new vision seemed like it may have come a bit too late. A few years prior, out of financial need, the congregation had sold their property to a non-profit housing society. They still worshiped as tenants in the same building, but they knew they would need to find a new property to buy in order to pursue the fullness of their vision. They still had hope that the revenue from the sale would allow them to buy a smaller property and attract partners for a new project, but they knew their odds were limited without property.

From Pastor Greg's perspective, his congregation had acted out of a lack of understanding of their development options. The decision to sell made classic real estate sense; they couldn't afford to maintain their building, so they sold. A couple of years later, they were hearing of churches that had partnered with developers to leverage the equity in their property. Not long after selling, they also heard of government funding and programs that would have made maintaining ownership even more viable. Now, they are motivated to share their hard-learned lesson with other churches: it is much easier to sell religious property than it is to acquire or re-acquire land.

#### **4.1.4. Church entry into real estate development**

If retaining church property seems financially unfeasible, and selling religious property offers an undesirable, irrevocable alternative, what place is available for religious congregations in the post-secular, neoliberal city? And, in a city in which fewer and fewer residents connect with the Christian faith, what role can churches play in the public realm? For a rising number of churches, the answers to both these questions converge in reconsidering their land use. Through partnerships with real estate developers, many churches manage to sustain their institution, stay in their neighbourhood, create revenue streams, and possibly expand their social ministries in the community (Mian, 2012). Thus, in the midst of their existential crisis, the legacy of property ownership positions churches as opportune players in the game that matters most to the neoliberal city: real estate and housing. Determined not to lose further ground to the world of real estate, many landowning churches are learning to leverage their land asset, ensure their enduring place in the city, and craft a new public role for themselves.

Precedents for church entry into real estate development have been traced to New York City in the 1970s, when St. Peter's Lutheran Church struck a \$9 million dollar deal with Citigroup (Eckstrom, 2006). The deal included redeveloping the land on which the church stood to create a new building for the church as well as an office tower and retail space for the corporation. The model was soon replicated across the New York City area, with many more churches selling either land or air rights to developers for a similar exchange of new church space (Satow, 2006). Mian (2012) has counted seventy-five houses of worship involved in development deals in the New York City area. She cites Uptown Partners developer Joe Holland, who claims that partnering with a church is the "new model for creating upscale housing" (Mian, 2008, p. 2154). Likewise, Reverend Brashear of West Park Presbyterian Church has argued, "Real estate is the most important, cutting-edge issue for urban ministry" (Satow, 2006). These projects have successfully generated sufficient profit for both church and developers who often refer to the deals as win-win.

In 1975, Christ Church Cathedral became the first Vancouver church to leverage its land assets in order to ensure its enduring presence in the city (McNeill, 2002; Miller, 2007). Built in 1895 as a small Anglican parish, the church holds the title as Vancouver's oldest surviving church building. Following twenty years of decline in congregation membership and finance, Christ Church began exploring partnering with developers in the early 1970s. However, the congregation's initial plan, which would allow a developer to build an office tower with a contemporary cathedral below grade, faced surprising opposition from the public (Miller, 2007). In response to public outcry, Vancouver's City Council requested the provincial government designate the Cathedral with heritage designation and city staff brokered a deal to transfer the church's unused density to the owner of the church's adjacent site. The deal allowed the development of the Park Place building, at the time the city's largest office building, in exchange for protective measures applied to the Cathedral. It also provided remuneration to the Cathedral over a 102 year period, which by 2002 had already amounted to \$4.5 million in payments. In 2002, the City approved an additional Heritage Revitalization Agreement (HRA) that allowed the Cathedral to complete extensive restoration work and seismic upgrades.

Another HRA involving a church soon followed. In 2004, COV staff initiated a revitalization scheme between Westbank Projects Ltd. and Coastal Victory Church (P Mondor, 2003). The latter is the current owner of the Colonial Revival Style heritage

building known as the First Church of Christ, Scientist, built in 1919. The deal required Coastal to accept heritage designation, which will legally protect the exterior and interior of the church, in exchange for a \$4.4 million fund to finance the rehabilitation of the church. In addition to funds for church restoration, Westbank's public benefit package also included a sculpture garden and a \$1 million contribution to the City's Affordable Housing Fund. In return, Westbank gained 50,000 square acres of density from the church's unused air parcels. The density bonus went towards a mixed-use, 57-storey development. The Shangri La tower is the tallest building in Vancouver and includes a 90 room five-star hotel, 42 extended stay suites, 225 general office live-work units, and 61 market strata units. City staff's policy report on the project's rezoning and HRA notes that, although residential units are not generally allowed under the Central Business District's zoning bylaws, city policy allows residential development to be considered in order to facilitate heritage retention. The Westbank-Coastal agreement intentionally leveraged the profitability of Vancouver's residential real estate in a deal that was beneficial to all parties—municipality, developer, and church.

Often described as win-win agreements, church-developer partnerships have nevertheless often been contentious. Hinging on the profitability of high-density market rate housing, these projects have justifiably been criticized for contributing to neighbourhood gentrification and the displacement of urban residents (Mian, 2008, 2012). Such neighbourhood effects are counter-productive to the church's goals for redevelopment. If their own members, or the populations their programs serve, must relocate to other neighbourhoods, then new worship space and well-funded social services cannot serve their intended purposes.

As a result, new models for church redevelopment have emerged that focus on civic-minded development, leveraging land assets to develop affordable housing (Mian 2008). This innovation to the model has been replicated in other major global cities. London (Wainwright, 2020), Toronto (Longley, 2019; Naccarato, 2019), and Vancouver (Ball, 2014), cities known for their housing unaffordability, have all seen a mix of church redevelopment deals that contribute to a mix of market rate and affordable housing. While the first priority for such projects is the financial sustainability of the church, these innovations recognize that the maximization of profit is incompatible with the missional role of the church in the community.

With their primary concern being to preserve their institution's place in the community, many churches may not be aware of the broader implications of their involvement in real estate development. Mian (2008) has cautioned that "religious institutions are building without direction and foresight, and their actions have a serious impact on the community in which they reside" (p. 2144). In addition, redevelopment changes the very nature of a church's role in the community. According to Mian, "Churches are no longer centres of spirituality, worship, and social service. They are providers of housing, creators of retail establishments, and administrators of extensive programmes that may or may not be secular in nature" (2008, p. 2153). On the one hand, church-market partnerships are successful in ensuring a church's enduring existence and providing them a new public role. On the other hand, these changes fundamentally alter a church's public presence, provoking more questions than clarity with regards to the church's existential crisis.

## **4.2. Analysis of church redevelopment in Vancouver: 2006-present**

In this section, I provide an overview of church property redevelopment projects that have taken place in Vancouver since the mid 2000s. I analyze these projects and propose a typology of church redevelopment. As far as I am aware, there exists no exhaustive list of church redevelopment projects in Vancouver. My best attempt at providing a systematic overview of projects between 2005 and 2020 is summarized in Appendix A. I began by searching publicly documents for church rezoning and development applications. I also conducted a review of news media articles that report church redevelopments and cross-referenced data from these articles with rezoning applications and church websites.

According to my research, the City of Vancouver has approved at least twenty church redevelopment projects between 2005 and 2020. Nine of these have been completed. Three additional projects that have not received rezoning approval are included in Appendix A. St Andrew Wesley United Church is undergoing major renovations and upgrades to their downtown heritage building, a project that does not involve housing development but has been made possible by the sale of St Andrew Wesley's rental housing tower (City of Vancouver, n.d.-a; Stueck, 2002; Todd, 2019a). St Mary's Catholic Parish, included in the approved Joyce Collingwood Station Precinct

Plan (Chan, 2017b; City of Vancouver, 2017), has announced their plans to redevelop their property to add four hundred units of seniors housing. Another project by Our Lady of Perpetual Help has been announced but has yet to submit rezoning application to the COV (Ruck, 2019).

Table 6 consolidates the inventory of church redevelopment projects into a typology of church property redevelopment. The typology differentiates projects based on degrees of property transfer from the faith sector to the private real estate sector. *Private real estate developments* are projects on former place of worship sites that have been purchased by real estate developers. Worship space and community serving space are not retained in this approach, resulting in a total privatization of church property. *Church-developer partnerships* vary based on the deals negotiated between churches and developers, but generally rely on profit from market housing development to retain or replace the worship and community serving space of congregations. The *sell-to-build model* separates property transaction from property redevelopment. In this model, churches often sell a portion of their property and then use the sale revenue to finance a project on their remaining property. This model often results in two development projects: the church's autonomous redevelopment and a separate private real-estate development on the sold property. And finally, the *church and non-market partnership*, which makes use of available government, non-profit, or foundation financing, offers a slower or riskier road to development but one that does not result in the privatization of church property. Each of these models is examined in turn in the following sub-sections.

**Table 6. Typology of church redevelopment projects**

<b>Type of development</b>	<b>Private real-estate development</b>	<b>Church &amp; developer partnership</b>	<b>Sell-to-build model</b>	<b>Church &amp; non-market partnership</b>
Example churches	Mount Pleasant Baptist, St. John United, St Mark's, Westpoint Christian	Coastal Church, First Baptist, Central Presbyterian, Oakridge United, Vancouver Chinese Presbyterian, Knox United	St Andrew Wesley United, Corpus Christi Catholic Parish, John Paul II Pastoral Centre	Co:Here, Lakewood United Multicultural, Oakridge Lutheran, St Mary's Catholic Parish
Influencing factors/reasons	Congregation closed or relocated Church building has little heritage value	Need for updated church Need for revenue/space to continue providing social programming Neighbourhood plans support residential densification	Specific, non-residential church building project needs financing New project represents limited neighbourhood change	Church prioritizes affordable housing provision Government funding/programs available
Challenges	Below-market units depend on municipal incentives Community opposition is common	Risk of development partners backing out if project is deemed unprofitable Risk of community criticism if no affordable housing is created	Church has limited influence over development on sold land	Building partnerships and negotiating agreements can take many years to develop
Development process	Church sells property to private developer	Church and developer negotiate a deal, often with support from city planners Church gives up portion of the property, project or air rights in exchange for new space	Church/denomination sells property to finance redevelopment projects Two independent development projects	Funding comes from multiple government programs, non-profit partners, and/or private donors
Outcome	Market residential Raises value of land in surrounding area Loss of community serving space	Market residential development finances new church & community serving space Project form/density and housing type varies according to neighbourhood plan	Church retains ownership of new project High level of autonomy in project design Net loss of church property	Affordable rental, community serving space No property lost to private real estate sector
Variants	Adaptive re-use: low-density residential neighbourhoods or when buildings have heritage value	Below-market or social housing units built as community amenity contribution: income from rents creates revenue for church	Portfolio approach: Denomination reviews portfolio of properties and makes strategic sales to finance new projects	Co-owned project model: Oakridge Lutheran and Catalyst Development co-own below-market rental project

## 4.2.1. Private real estate development

**Table 7. Private real estate developments 2006-2020**

Church Name	Developer	Project Description	Status
Mount Pleasant Baptist Church	n/a	Strata condominium	Completed 2006
Associated Presbyterian Church (Kingsington-Cedar Cottage)	n/a	Adaptive re-use—artist live/work space in single-family house	Completed 2007
St John United Church (West End)	Westbank/Petersen Group	186 units market rental, including 6 senior subsidized units for 5 years	Church sold in 2009; Rezoning approved 2012 under Short Term Incentives Rental Program; Completed 2014
Kerrisdale Baptist Church	Bogner Development Group	17 market residential, commercial/retail space	Church sold in 2013, burned in 2016. Rezoning approved in 2015.
Catholic Charities Shelter/RCAV Head Offices (Downtown)	Amacon	131 strata condominium, commercial/retail space, 6 story hotel	Rezoning approved in 2018
St Mark's Church (Kitsilano)	Jameson Development Corp	63 secured rental units (20% below market, 40% for families)	Rezoning approved 2019 under Moderate Income Rental Pilot Program
Westpointe Christian Church (Kitsilano)	Form Projects Inc	14 units secured market rental	Church sold in 2015; Rezoning approved 2019 under Affordable Housing Choices Interim Rezoning Policy
Corpus Christi Catholic Parish (Killarney)	Sunrise Seniors Homes	100 unit senior's community care facility	Rezoning approved 2019

When congregations shrink and become unable to maintain their church building, their most obvious option is to sell the property and invest the sale revenue elsewhere. Congregations may then relocate, like Westpointe Christian, which sold its Kitsilano property to buy a new building in Richmond (Stirk, 2017b). They may also merge with another congregation, as when St Mark's and St. George Anglican merged into the new St Mary Magdalen's parish (Diocese of New Westminster, 2018). Sometimes, congregations or denominational oversight bodies manage to attract a buyer whose vision for the site aligns with their values. For example, Corpus Christi Catholic Parish sold part of its site to Sunrise Seniors Homes who plans to build a 100 unit seniors community care facility (City of Vancouver, n.d.-b; O'Connor, 2018). Other times, despite a congregation's wish to preserve their building for community use, financial pressures

win out, as when the United Church Conference sold St. John's United Church to Westbank Corp (West End Neighbours, n.d.).

Private real estate development includes any type of property redevelopment that occurs after a place of worship has been sold to a market developer. This type of redevelopment cannot technically be classified as "church redevelopment" because it does not involve a church partner and results in the loss of public worship and community serving space. However, I include this type of project in this typology for two reasons. Firstly, I wish to demonstrate that this is still a common outcome for church property. In fact, with 8 of 23 projects in Appendix A following this model of redevelopment, private real estate development is still the most likely type of redevelopment to occur in Vancouver. In 2019, two church rezoning applications were approved and both were for private real estate projects. Despite emerging models for church property redevelopment, it is important to continue paying attention to the ongoing trend of privatization of religious space.

My second reason for including this type of project is that it offers a useful illustration of how municipal planning policies shape redevelopment projects. Rezoning applications for several of these projects refer to housing policies designed to create or protect neighbourhood affordability. Rezoning for the 22-storey, 186-unit market rental tower built by Westbank Corp at the former site of St John's United Church was considered under the Short Term Incentive for Rental Program, which was intended to address the lack of new purpose-built rental options in the West End (City of Vancouver, n.d.-j). It is unlikely that the project would have developed purpose-built rental if the West End Plan had not created policies that addressed the lack of new rental options in the neighbourhood (Erdman 2020). The same project also provided six senior subsidized units for a period of five years.

More recently, Form Projects Inc received rezoning approval to redevelop the former property of Westpointe Christian Church. Their rezoning application was considered under the Affordable Housing Choices Interim Rezoning Policy (City of Vancouver, n.d.-o), another council policy designed to encourage light densification in residential neighbourhoods while adding to the city's rental stock. Similarly, Jameson Development Corp's application to rezone the previous site of St Mark's Church was approved under the Moderate Income Rental Pilot Program (City of Vancouver, n.d.-k),

another policy that waives development fees in exchange for twenty percent of units being below market and forty percent being large enough for families.

It is worth noting that several of these private real estate developments have faced community opposition in the rezoning process (Chan, 2019; O'Connor, 2019a, 2019b; West End Neighbours, n.d.). Concern by community members have been taken into account in development application revisions, though these revisions seem to be fairly minor. It is likely that City Council approves these applications despite opposition because they meet planning goals and implement policies that reflect council priorities—densification, rental housing development, new seniors housing—or provide sufficient community amenity contributions. While none of these real estate development projects provide deep affordability such as social housing units, municipal policies and City Council have successfully influenced their direction towards some affordability or preferred tenure type. Of course, this type of direction will be dependent on shifting Council priorities, which itself is a reflection of the political and economic context.

#### **4.2.2. Church and developer partnership**

Since the Heritage Revitalization Agreement precedents of Christ Church Cathedral (McNeill, 2002) and Coastal Church (P Mondor, 2003), another seven Vancouver churches have sought to negotiate win-win arrangements with real estate developers. In church-developer partnerships, a church trades air parcels or a portion of its property in exchange for the developer financing the church's redevelopment project. Table 8 demonstrates that the model has been adapted in diverse settings and to various ends. Knox United Church (City of Vancouver, n.d.-p), First Baptist Church (City of Vancouver, n.d.-i; Phil Mondor, 2005), and Dunbar Ryerson United Church (City of Vancouver, n.d.-n) have entered into partnerships with developers to finance restoration and seismic upgrades for their heritage buildings. The Church of God in Vancouver (City of Vancouver, n.d.-h), Central Presbyterian Church (City of Vancouver, n.d.-d), Oakridge United Church (City of Vancouver, n.d.-g), and Vancouver Chinese Presbyterian Church (City of Vancouver, n.d.-q), on the other hand, have entered into project agreements that involve the demolition of prior church buildings and the construction of new structures. This model has been successful in the Downtown and West End as well as within the Cambie Corridor.

**Table 8. Church-development partnerships**

<b>Church Name &amp; Development partner</b>	<b>Church gain</b>	<b>Developer gain</b>	<b>Status</b>
Coastal Church (Downtown) & Westbank	Restoration of heritage church building	Air rights for Living Shangri La—307 units market residential + 119 room hotel	Completed 2006
Knox United Church (Dunbar) & Hon Towers	Restoration of heritage church, replacement church annex and community serving space	64 units market residential for seniors	Rezoning approved 2009, Building Permit pending
Church of God in Vancouver (Marpole) & South Street Development Group	New church space within new building	129 units market rental under Secured Market Rental Housing Policy	Rezoning approved 2014, Completed 2017
Central Presbyterian (West End) & Bosa Properties	New building with new church space, 45 non-market rental units	169 units market rental	Rezoning approved 2014, Completed 2018
Oakridge United Church & Townline Homes	New structure with new church space on ground floor	49 units market residential in new structure	Rezoning approved 2016, anticipated completion 2020
First Baptist Church (Downtown) & Westbank	Restoration of heritage church, new community serving space, 61 units social housing	331 units market residential	Rezoning approved 2017, anticipated completion 2022
Vancouver Chinese Presbyterian Church (Oakridge) & Wall Financial Group	New building with new church space, childcare space	20 units market rental	Rezoning approved 2017, anticipated completion 2022
Pacific Spirit/ Dunbar Ryerson United Church	Restoration of heritage church, new building with community space, and 32 units social housing	40 units market residential	Rezoning approved 2017, development partner has since dropped out

First Baptist Church has built on the Coastal-Westbank model to propose the largest church redevelopment project currently active in Vancouver (Erdman, 2020). Located on First Baptist's large downtown property, the project covers almost a whole city block. Like previous projects that involve HRAs, the First Baptist-Westbank partnership exchanges a density bonus for the rehabilitation and seismic upgrades of the church's heritage building (Phil Mondor, 2005). This project, however, takes previous downtown models a step further. In addition to the restoration of its heritage building, the church will gain twenty market rental and 41 social housing units as well as a new church ancillary space that includes 37 childcare spaces, a gymnasium, a counselling centre, and offices (City of Vancouver, n.d.-i). Westbank, the development partner, will use the density bonus to build a 57-storey tower containing 331 market strata units. The

COV will also benefit from the deal with the in-kind contribution of significant outdoor public space as well as a \$65 million cash community amenity contribution (Chan, 2017a).

Municipal planning policies play a large role in creating opportunities for these partnerships. Location-specific policies that allow for added height and density have allowed for several of these projects. The West End Community Plan created the opportunity for both First Baptist and Central Presbyterian (Erdman, 2020). The Cambie Corridor Plan is cited in rezoning applications for Oakridge United (City of Vancouver, n.d.-g), the Church of God (City of Vancouver, n.d.-h), and Vancouver Chinese Presbyterian (City of Vancouver, n.d.-q). Heritage preservation policies have also created opportunities. Even in the low-density residential neighbourhoods of Dunbar and Kerrisdale, Knox United and Pacific Spirit have leveraged policies that allow additional height and density to incentivize heritage protection (Erdman, 2020).

The heritage status of church buildings is also an important factor in church-developer partnerships. While HRAs provide some opportunities for churches, the lack of heritage designation also removes the challenges and expenses that accompany building restoration and upgrades (Erdman 2020). Central Presbyterian Church, for example, built a brand new structure that used up its entire lot. Instead of the extra cost that may have gone into restoring an ageing building, the project benefited from additional residential density. In addition to a new church sanctuary and preschool, the church also obtained 32 units of social housing (City of Vancouver, n.d.-d).

Churches understand that developers partner with them because of the opportunity to make a profit (Erdman, 2020). Therefore, churches make tradeoffs on their priorities in order to preserve the project's profitability. In doing so, they encourage their partner's ongoing involvement. There is a certain level of risk involved in negotiating these tradeoffs. Ultimately, downturns in the economy can alter the partners' projected profit. In the case of the Pacific Spirit United project, the church's development partner at the time of receiving rezoning approval, Wall Financial, backed out of the project after a downturn in the real estate market (Erdman 2020). After nine years of work on their proposal, the church was left to look for another partner and may need to wait for the economy to improve before finding a developer who will find the current proposal attractive (Bula, 2019).

### 4.2.3. The sell-to-build model

In sell-to-build projects, churches sell a portion of their property in order to finance redevelopment projects on their remaining property. A real estate developer likely acquires and redevelops the sold property, but the private real estate development and church redevelopment happen independently from one another. Apart from the initial land transaction, there is no ongoing partnership or further exchanges between church and developer. Keeping land transactions separate from the redevelopment process has the advantage of creating more autonomy for the church's project, as it does not need to negotiate its priorities against those of the developer. The church is therefore able to pursue projects that are less profitable in the short run.

The projects that have followed this approach have all resulted in a large non-residential development. In order to finance seismic upgrades and renovations for its downtown heritage building, St Andrew Wesley United Church has sold the 199-unit, market rental property it had built in 2002 (Brown, 2019; Stueck, 2002; Todd, 2019b). A similar scheme to sell a portion of Holy Rosary Cathedral's property to finance \$24 million in repairs and seismic upgrades is under consideration (Bula, 2019; Todd, 2019b). The sale of Holy Rosary property would be the second instance where the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Vancouver sold downtown property. In 2014, the Catholic Charities building and Archdiocese head offices were sold to Amazon in order to finance a new Shaughnessy head office (Bula, 2019; Li, 2018). The new John Paul II Pastoral Centre includes 9 social housing units and a chapel (City of Vancouver, n.d.-e). In Killarney, Corpus Christi Catholic Parish sold part of its property to Sunrise Seniors Homes and has applied for a development permit to build a new parish school (City of Vancouver, n.d.-c; O'Connor, 2018).

The sale of property offers an alternative to housing development as a source of financing, but it can significantly shrink a church's land assets. In the short run, the advantage of such projects is their ability to fund non-residential projects that offer limited revenue streams. Heritage preservation, office space, social housing units for retired priests, and schools provide public benefit that is in line with these church's mission. However, Robert Brown, president of Catalyst Community Developments Society, has pointed out that these projects are not always wise long term decisions.

“Once you’ve sold that asset, community organizations are never going to be able to buy that back. It can end up being a short term solution but a long term loss” (Bula, 2019).

**Table 9. Sell-to-build projects, 2006-2020**

<b>Church Name</b>	<b>Project Description</b>	<b>Status</b>
John Paul II Pastoral Centre (Shaughnessy)	Revenue from sale of former Downtown offices used to build new head office, 9 units social housing for retired priests, and a chapel	Completed 2015
St Andrew Wesley United Church (Downtown)	Revenue from sale of 199 unit rental property (built in 2002) used to finance restoration of heritage church	Building permit approved 2019
Corpus Christi Catholic Parish (Killarney)	Revenue from sale of a portion of property will finance new school and church upgrades	Pre-development

#### **4.2.4. Church & non-market partnership**

The impact of the housing affordability crisis in BC has been an issue of growing concern beyond the faith sector. Public demand for affordable housing has produced a surge of political interest and funding, as well as non-profit and social-purpose real estate initiatives (May, 2020). Canada’s growing Community Housing Sector (CHS) is generating new partnership opportunities and funding sources for churches that wish to prioritize the building of affordable homes through redevelopment. Whether partnerships happen with government, with foundations, or with faith-based or secular non-profits, the CHS approach seeks to retain land assets in non-market ownership by promoting “the long-term social impact opportunities to non-profits with land assets” (May, 2020, p. 7).

There is much diversity among CHS partnerships: Lakewood United Multicultural Church is partnering with BC Housing (United Church of Canada & Colliers International, 2019); Grandview Church raised funds from various partners: \$3.5 million in joint funding from federal and provincial governments, \$500,000 from the City of Vancouver, \$520,000 from Streettohome Foundation, and \$4.8 million from private donors (Chan, 2018; City of Vancouver, n.d.-I). Oakridge Lutheran Church partnered with Catalyst Development Society, a non-profit developer, who will be a co-owner of its new building. Social equity investments for the Oakridge Lutheran project came from Catalyst, Vancity Credit Union, the City of Vancouver, and private mission driven investors (Catalyst Community Development Society, n.d.). Two anticipated projects involve partnerships with Catholic parishes and Columbus Homes, the housing branch of the Knights of Columbus Catholic charity (Chan, 2017b; Ruck, 2019).

**Table 10. Church & non-market partnership**

<b>Church Name</b>	<b>Development partners</b>	<b>Project Description</b>	<b>Status</b>
Grandview Calvary Baptist Church	Co:Here Foundation; Salsbury Community Society (building operator)	26 co-housing units (mix of low & moderate income households), bottom floor is 100% communal space	Rezoning approved 2012, Completed 2018
Oakridge Lutheran Church	Catalyst Community Development Society; OLC Housing Society (building operator)	New church space; co- ownership of 46 units below- market rental and retail space	Rezoning approved 2016, Completed 2019
Lakewood United Multicultural Church	United Church of Canada; BC Housing & 3 Point Housing Society (building operator)	New church & community serving space, 104 rental units (30% permanently affordable)	Rezoning application referred to public hearing at March 10, 2020 Council hearing
St Mary's Catholic Parish	Columbus Homes	Added density to Columbus Towers seniors rental buildings to finance parish school upgrades	Pre-development, project mentioned in 2017 Joyce Collingwood Station Precinct Plan
Our Lady of Perpetual Help Parish	Columbus Homes	44 rental units at below- market rates	Pre-development

These church and non-market partnerships have produced impressive projects with three main advantages: retention of property in non-market hands, preservation of public worship and community serving space, and provision of affordable housing units. For example, the Lakewood United Multicultural Church partnership with BC Housing will provide a brand new church space at grade level and 104 units of affordable housing. Thirty percent will have rent geared income for low to middle income households (City of Vancouver, n.d.-m). A similar mix of rents accessible to low-income, moderate income, and market rates is also present in the Oakridge Lutheran (City of Vancouver, n.d.-f) and Grandview Church (City of Vancouver, n.d.-l) projects.

The advantages of CHS partnership may, for many churches, be outweighed by its many challenges. While social impact increases as churches take more control of their redevelopment project, so does the risk and required development expertise involved in establishing new partnerships and models (May, 2020). For example, Grandview Church, which I discuss at length in Chapter 5, spent 12 years raising project funds. The congregation was committed to a specific vision and wanted to maintain a high level of control over the project, so they were willing to put extra effort into finding funders that would support their vision. A project like Lakewood United's may involve

fewer risks in design and less effort in developing financing, but the final project will be required to uphold BC Housing operating agreements. The tradeoffs involved in CHS partnership are between risk and control.

There is reason to expect that the CHS will continue to grow, making the model increasingly approachable for congregations. May (2020) documents capacity-building efforts for the CHS among government, academia, non-profit organizations and associations, faith-based groups, indigenous groups, and mission-driven private businesses and funders. Along with new government funds for affordable housing at every level of government, new initiatives like BC Housing's Housing Hub and the Building It Right resources developed by Vancity's Social Impact Real Estate team are emerging in order to support non-profits and churches in their redevelopment goals. In the meantime, the risks involved in this emerging model may mean churches continue to favour partnerships with market developer, which offer relatively more clarity about project outcomes and timelines.

## **Conclusion**

This history of church housing development has demonstrated that churches have adapted to housing markets and policies as they have shifted over time. Under the welfare state model, churches took advantage of opportunities to partner with governments in public housing delivery. In the 1990s, when the Canadian federal government stopped funding new social housing production, churches lost their public partners to build housing for the "truly needy" (Suttor, 2016a). At the same time, many congregations were coming to terms with twenty years of decline in church membership and finances, and their energy to build for social need was interrupted as questions of congregational longevity became more pressing. Rising property values opened up new opportunities to partner with real estate developers. Municipal planning policies often enabled win-win redevelopment arrangements between city, church, and developer. More recently, a growing CHS has made non-market partnerships a more feasible option for a handful of churches. Opportunity, whether brought forth by policy or partners, has been key in shaping church housing developments.

The typology of church redevelopment projects presented in this chapter illustrates that municipal planning policies have power to shape redevelopment

outcomes, even when redevelopment projects follow market models. Heritage preservation policies, location specific neighbourhood plans, incentives to develop purpose built rental, requirements for affordable or family units, and the availability of housing grants, have all shaped the type, form, and tenure of church housing developments. This echoes Hackworth & Gullikson's (2013) argument that the role of urban institutions, and planning institutions in particular, have not been given proper attention when it comes to understanding church redevelopment.

Despite the influence of planning policy on these projects, this chapter confirms that the real estate sector has replaced the welfare state as the partner of choice for churches seeking to develop housing. In all but one inventory category, a major outcome is the transfer of church land from the non-profit, community-serving sector to the for-profit, real estate sector. Even as church-developer partnerships allow churches to remain owners of at least part of their sites, a net loss of public worship and community serving space is a common tradeoff. The emergence of initiatives that aim to preserve church-owned land in the non-market sector demonstrates that government, non-profits, and the CHS have all recognized the long-term loss involved in allowing current church redevelopment trends to continue (May, 2020). These players have understood that mission-driven landownership is more easily lost to the private sector than it is bought back.

An overview of recent church redevelopments can only hint at the goals and priorities churches have for their projects. Common outcomes of church redevelopments include preserving and upgrading heritage buildings, replacing ageing buildings that have little heritage with contemporary space, and providing market and non-market housing. How do these outcomes compare to the goals congregations have for redevelopment, and how do they relate to congregation's sense of mission? The next chapter examines how congregational mission and agency interact with redevelopment possibilities in the process of pursuing redevelopment.

## Chapter 5. Property, housing and mission

### Introduction

This chapter explores the role of congregational agency in shaping church redevelopment projects. With its focus on the economic, planning, and policy context, the previous chapter might lead to deterministic views of church housing development as mere adaptation to surroundings. Religious ecology theorists suggest that, “as religious institutions are affected by their external surroundings, they adapt their internal organizational structure and alter their congregational identity as they struggle to remain viable” (Cimino et al., 2012, p. 6). Yet, they have also critiqued interpretations of adaptation for connoting passivity and ignoring the role of congregational agency in adaptation. This chapter develops this critique. I examine the ways that congregation exercise agency by wrestling with questions of identity, mission, and vision and by integrating these to evolving realities about property, housing, and the church’s role in the broader community. I suggest that a congregation’s mission and vision mediates its response to the redevelopment opportunities posed by market and policy contexts.

In the first three parts of this chapter, I draw from ethnographic field work that includes interviews and informal conversations with church leaders. In part one, I examine exchanges that reveal that many congregations, after years of decline, struggle to have collective clarity about congregational identity, mission, and vision. Rather than exercising agency—which entails using congregational resources to address social needs and “encouraging both civic skills as well as political action” (Cimino, 2011, p. 161)—many declining congregations’ immediate preoccupations are mere maintenance. This focus on maintaining the congregation’s culture, tradition, and physical form poses a barrier to a renewed vision for the future. Nevertheless, most participants express a desire for a renewed vision and mission that can restore the church’s identity as a community institution.

In part two, I discuss several ways that congregational self-interest is being integrated with public interests around housing issues. This mutual self-interest reframes property as a potential instrument for reconnecting congregational mission to the community. In part three, I briefly discuss a few additional factors that point to

participant's desires for developing the church's agency through redevelopment processes.

The final part of this chapter provides a case study of the Co:Here housing project, built by Grandview Church and its offshoot, the Co:Here Foundation. In almost every theme emerging from these interviews, this project stood out as an anomaly. The Co:Here project emerged from a congregation with an exceptionally strong sense of identity, mission, and vision, as well as track record of involvement in its neighbourhood. I argue that Grandview Church is an example of a congregation with a well-developed sense of agency about its social role in the Grandview neighbourhood. Co:Here can be understood as the 'exception that proves the rule'. It demonstrates how congregational agency mediates the influence of market and policy contexts over a church redevelopment project, specifically by nurturing a confidence in the project's congregation-developed vision, mission, and values.

This analysis of congregational agency is more exploratory than it is systematic, and I acknowledge several limitations. Firstly, the small number of interviewees is by no means representative of all churches in Vancouver. Not only do several of the participants come from congregations outside of the City of Vancouver, they also do not evenly represent the mainline denominations. For example, even though my time in the field did allow me to have a few conversations with members of the United Church, readers will note the absence of an interview participant from this denomination. It is worth noting that the United Church of Canada has created a regional Property Resource Team to guide their congregations through redevelopment processes (Pacific Mountain Regional Council of the UCC, n.d.). It is possible that this denominational strategy has provided sufficient support to their congregations, making involvement in the broad based MVA network, and therefore my research project, relatively less appealing to leaders of this denomination. The lack of representativeness in my sample is due to the ethnographic context in which I first conducted interviews, which was not designed to meet the needs of the present research project. Nevertheless, I chose to conduct a secondary analysis of these interviews because of their relevance to the discussion of congregational mission.

It is difficult to say how a more representative sample may have shaped the data. It is likely that a larger sample including participants from more diverse denominations

would allow for trends and differences to emerge among denominations. For example, do denominations that make decisions about property regionally have a different approach than more decentralized denominations where individual congregations own their own land titles? Theological beliefs may also be significant from denomination to denomination, shaping whether development is viewed as an issue of financial stewardship, charity, congregational development, or missional witness. More research will be necessary to better understand how governance structures and theological variation impact decisions from denomination to denomination

Another limitation of this data may be that participants may share biases that come from their involvement in MVA. I initially recruited interview participants for a research project conducted in partnership with MVA, which intended to explore, among other things, church values for affordable housing development. It is possible that participants, through their participation in MVA leadership training and organizing campaigns, have biases in favour of re-organized congregational mission and affordable, non-market development. The former could result from applying organizing principles at the congregational level, which often lead to fresh clarity about congregational identity, mission, and vision. The latter could result from participating in MVA's broad based listening campaigns, which have consistently identified the pressures of unaffordable housing as priority concern for the alliance. The bias in favour of affordable housing solutions may also be influenced by participants' awareness of housing campaigns among other IAF affiliates, such as the Nehemiah Homes model from the South Bronx Churches affiliate (Stuart & Heinemeier, 2006) and the London Community Land Trust from the London Citizens affiliate (London CLT, n.d.). Therefore, it is possible that members of congregations outside of the MVA network wouldn't share these participants' interest in renewed congregational mission and affordable, non-market housing developments.

## **5.1. Identifying the need for renewed vision and mission**

### **Holding on to the past**

For churches with declining memberships and diminishing budgets, it can be a long road to accepting that the congregation's future will not look like its past or even its present. For many church leaders I interviewed, the strength with which congregants

hold on to the past poses a significant barrier to redeveloping their vision for the future and deciding on fresh priorities for everyday mission. Several participants observed that many church members experience denial that things will need to change. Allen Aicken, a retired Presbyterian minister who participates in the regional Presbytery, an oversight body for Presbyterian congregations, has witnessed this pattern in many instances:

Of course, every congregation dreams on in a sort of vision that one day [members] will come back and we can sort of hang on to this and it will all be the way it used to be. It won't of course, but that kind of reality check is needed.

This reality check, if it has been avoided for several years, can come quite harshly. While some with foresight feel frustrated and impatient for congregations to accept this reality, others find it a painful grieving process. Yet, those who have found the courage to embrace a changing reality have been able to wrestle with new visions for the future.

Accepting that church activities cannot carry on in the familiar way is an emotional process for many congregations. Gail Berger worships at Gloria Dei Lutheran Church on the North Shore. She remembers a time when their congregation had 250 congregants. Now, she says their congregation consists of 50 members “on a good day.” This small and ageing congregation has experienced a fair amount of grief recently. “Basically, average age is 79”, she says. “Yeah, and we have had five funerals in the past month or so. So it gives a sense of what’s going on”. Added to the grief of fellow members’ death is that of acknowledging that the congregation is not attracting new, younger members. “I think that, initially, they thought that [the congregation] could continue and grow, but that’s turned out to be very difficult.” Their church now counts “five younger couples, four of them are children of members of the congregation... people are not exactly pouring in”. After years of hoping that the congregation could endure past the current, ageing congregation, Gloria Dei has come to accept that maintaining the current church “just becomes impossible”. Church members have been exploring property redevelopment as a possible means of ensuring their church has an enduring legacy in their community.

## **Finding fresh vision and mission**

Tellison Glover, the Director for Mission and Ministry Development for the Anglican Diocese of New Westminster, has worked alongside several churches who

wish to reinvigorate their sense of mission. He describes a view of church identity that echoes elements of religious ecology theory, in which faith institutions are mutually shaped by and shaping of the urban environment. While there are components of a church's mission that "create the sense of that [church's] identity", he says, there are some that are less concrete, changing over time according to context:

To use a biological perspective, a cellular perspective, a church is a cell. A cell has a membrane. The mission is the membrane, a part of the formation of the mission is a membrane. We are semi-permeable... adapting [to] and giving influence to [the surrounding] community.

For Glover, a church's mission is not static but must respond to the changing community. Encouraging congregants to turn outwards to the community and seek to understand the current neighbourhood context and needs would likely result with a degree of organizational response and potential change.

According to Glover, churches who are turning outwards to understand the changing neighbourhood context are increasingly considering how their mission calls for a response to housing pressures. Through this approach, "there has to come to the conversation the idea of property redevelopment," he says. "Just because of the [community] concerns that are out there. Because if you're not part of that conversation, then you are, in a sense, declaring your irrelevance in that community". He is working with a growing number of churches who are coming to these realizations:

We're getting on a weekly basis, more and more parishes that are saying, we have this idea. We want to begin along a path of redevelopment. And that's actually saying a lot. There are many of our parishes that presently are not having that conversation. But there's a growing number of those that are willing to do that.... People, their eyes are being open. They're saying, how can we do things in a new way? And I am so thrilled that it's happening.

For Glover, a congregation's willingness to consider redevelopment is significant precisely because it reflects an appetite to have hard conversations about vision. If the church's built form is part of what connects a congregation to its surrounding community, then a new built form reflects the intention for new way of engaging that community. The opportunity Glover sees is for to redevelop property in conjunction with redeveloping a congregation's vision for its relationship to the neighbourhood.

Despite the efforts of leaders who desire fresh expressions of their church's mission, several participants identified a lack of visionary leadership as a key barrier to redevelopment. In this context, a visionary leader is one who could guide a visioning process for the project and would direct the congregation along every step of the redevelopment journey. Aicken described leadership in setting vision as a prerequisite for a congregation even considering redevelopment:

I think if the congregation goes from a church building to let's say redevelopment, that's a long journey. And [they] can't take it seriously until [they] can think of what step one and step two would be, before [they] can even think about it. So it's some help with that, some help with their visioning, is what they need... They need a lot of encouragement, a lot of leadership, and a lot of visioning. A lot of labour and leadership would have to go into that.

He has seen initiatives to explore redevelopment come to an end and attributes these stops to a lack of leadership. Aicken sees the journey from renewing vision, to reconnecting to the neighbourhood, to redevelopment as one that needs considerable guidance, which is lacking for many congregations.

Margaret Marquardt, who pastored St Margaret's Anglican Church through its redevelopment journey in the in 1990s, shared some of what she learned from being the "primary" leader for the project. "It's complicated," she says, "It's really time consuming". She would like other "primary" project leaders to know that they "will be helped through each step". Based on her experience, she suggests that visionary leadership for redevelopment projects might need to come from outside congregations, "if there's not the capability within the [congregation] to do it". She says, the need is "to have people who would be clear enough with the parish about how they could [redevelop]" and suggests that, within the Anglican diocese, there "could be more support to see whether there's some parishes that would like to pursue [redevelopment]". While such support structures develop, she has been proactive in offering external support to other clergy and lay leaders, speaking with them about the option and benefits of redeveloping their church property. She hopes this external visionary leadership will inspire other congregations to see new possibilities.

## 5.2. Connecting mission to property and housing

### Rethinking stewardship

As churches reimagine connection to their surrounding community, long-held assumptions about the relationship between congregational finances and property are coming into question. Traditionally, church budgets have relied on financial support from congregants. Congregants were responsible to sustain a church budget that could maintain church property, pay clergy, and provide operating funds. However, high property maintenance costs and diminishing financial support has meant fewer congregations can balance that equation.

Marquardt describes the “maintenance” approach that has become common for churches who can’t keep up with the traditional financial model:

What happens sometimes is that churches will kind of pull back into a little bit of maintenance. Go three quarter time for their clergy or half time for the clergy. What sometimes happens is that if the parish owns a former rectory, former clergy house, they will then consider selling that to bring in the money.

Cutting down on salaries and selling part of their property helps to create some space in the church budget and can keep the congregation alive for a while. However, according to Marquardt, churches have “to move beyond maintenance” and explore sustainable, financial stewardship. She believes “there has to be some movement to say that we could do something different, so we don’t have to stay in maintenance. And if we [go through a redevelopment process] we are going to make a contribution into the community”. She sees this maintenance approach as a key barrier to pursuing a new missional relationship with the surrounding community

Several participants mentioned that congregational finances are guided by the Christian value for stewardship. The lens of stewardship reframes church resources—including land and property, but also the oft cited categories of *time*, *talent*, and *treasure*—as ultimately belonging to God. These resources, according to one participant, are a “gift” from God, and, according to another, to be used “for the greater glory of God”. Large revenues and budgets are not the bottom line in this point of view, but congregations do have a responsibility to faithfully manage resources and finances in ways that allow for the ongoing support of their mission.

When Marquardt was the pastor of St Margaret's, her congregation defied the traditional model of church finances. "We would attract people, but they didn't really have money," she recalls. "So it's that really difficult place, when you're engaged in mission and you attract people who you want to be part of the parish but may be on social assistance. They're not wealthy, they're not able to make much of a contribution financially, but you're doing the work of the church". In Marquardt's perspective, difficulty raising money from parishioner contributions was not necessarily a sign that the church wasn't faithfully stewarding its resources. Rather, it was an invitation to look at other resources, like their land, which could be stewarded differently to support their mission. Instead of selling their property to maintain their current budget, St. Margaret's decided to leverage their land to create new revenue streams.

With a long-term perspective and an understanding of the scarcity of land in Vancouver, selling off any land seemed like poor stewardship to Marquardt. That is why, for many years, she encouraged the congregation at St. Margaret's to hold on to its excess property. "I continued to say over and over to go that route. Hold on to that building. Because we don't know what we could use it for... You'll never get, in this city, that land back. And in terms of mission for the church you'll never know". Though unsure of what the property would become, Marquardt was sure that the church's land was worth more than its dollar amount. This anecdote captures how leaders with an awareness of real estate in Vancouver appreciate the social value of congregation-owned land. For them, selling church property is a one way street, an irreversible decision. They are eager to explore alternative opportunities that address their need for cash flow while allowing them to hold on to property.

Joan Seidl, who is the president of the board of the 127 Society for Housing, echoed the sentiment that maintenance may not be fulfilling the value of faithful stewardship. "Just sitting on the land—although we've gotten really used to that model, and comfortable in it—it does seem as if it's not being as activist as we might be". She goes on to cite the Parable of the Talents, told by Jesus in the gospel of Matthew<sup>6</sup>. In this biblical story, a master going on a journey leaves several servants in charge of a sum of money. Upon the master's return, servants are rewarded according to the growth they generated. One servant, afraid of losing what had been given to them, keeps his

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<sup>6</sup> Matthew 25: 14-30

money buried and is severely punished when he simply returns the original sum to the master. Seidl sees a connection between the money in the story and land entrusted to congregations. Land, in her view, is an asset. The story challenges her: “Are we going to bury the talents or are we going to make something happen with them?” The value of stewardship, for Seidl, Marquardt, and many other church leaders, requires looking beyond maintaining the current model for how church finances are run and how church land is used.

## **Revisiting the mission of housing delivery**

Involvement in housing has long been a significant part of mainline churches’ mission in the Metro Vancouver region. Several participants problematized implications that the ‘crisis’ presents a new call to action for churches. Fr. Matthew Johnson, street outreach priest with St James’ Anglican Church, has seen the housing ‘crisis’ build. “It’s been here,” he says, “and, you know, it was here when I was a student here forty years ago. He acknowledges that the issue is different now than before, but it is not a new issue for churches. “We’ve been doing redevelopment from before the really big housing crisis thing”, he says. Seidl has also seen the housing crisis worsen since the 127 Society was founded in the 1980s. “We felt like we had a housing crisis then”, she says. “Of course I’ve only seen the situation become more and more desperate. I feel increasingly the pressure to provide decent housing”. For these two participants, who have been keeping track of housing problems in the region for several decades, now is not the time for churches to forget the element of their mission that has long led them to act on housing issues.

In addition, the current expression of the ‘housing crisis’ is bringing fresh awareness and added urgency for churches to act on housing. Even churches that have not previously been involved in housing issues are increasingly aware that housing is no longer a concern exclusively facing vulnerable groups. Aicken was involved with a regional survey of social issues in the Presbyterian Church. The survey, which had 105 respondents, identified housing as a clear area of concern despite most members being well housed. He interprets the finding based on what he knows of the average Presbyterian member:

I think they're one degree removed from it. They perceive it, they read their newspapers, they see people sleeping on Burrard Street. And that's a thing that I, as a university student, never experienced, but you can experience right now. You hear many, many stories of people who have well paying positions who can't afford a house. I mean that strikes home, it's on talk radio and television. I think our people are concerned, second degree concerned, if you know what I mean. They know it's a problem even though they may not be suffering from it.

This reflection captures a shift in the perceived population affected by housing pressures. Whereas many church members are comfortably housed, they are noticing that people not unlike themselves now struggle with housing costs. Affordable housing is no longer only a need of the most vulnerable and marginalized.

As a result, a growing number of churches are now extending the mission of church-built housing to include groups beyond the traditional categories of seniors and homeless. Even as someone who interacts with homeless persons on a daily basis, Johnson particularly stressed this point:

I really think that we need to be thinking not just about easily identified groups such as people with handicaps, seniors, and street involved homeless people, but I think we also need to be thinking of working folk as well. Because I think they are so challenged as to be finding themselves marginalized. Although the fact is they have a job, a place to live, and often some of them have two or three jobs, and seem to have it together, you wouldn't think they're marginalized, but their lives are really, really hard. So I think we need to be thinking about working folk, working families in particular. Not just the easily identifiable groups.

This expansion of target groups for church housing development reflects congregations' awareness of the evolving needs in their surrounding community. As organizations with orientations to community, mainline churches, despite their many internal struggles, are demonstrating their sensitivity to dynamics external to their organization.

## **Organizational impact of housing unaffordability**

Increasingly, the membership and financial pressures facing congregations seem tied to housing pressures in the surrounding community. A growing number of church leaders are realizing that they are losing some of their core members and leaders because of lack of housing options in the community. Members, especially those from younger generations, often leave their congregations when they move out of their

parents' homes, partly because they move to more affordable areas. Seniors downsize and retire to more affordable cities. Other members take on second jobs to cover housing costs, becoming too busy to maintain church involvement. As stories like these become more and more common in churches, the severity of housing pressures becomes institutional. When this is the case, developing affordable homes on church property becomes a meaningful way for congregations to resist trends in the housing market. In some cases, housing developed by churches is made available to members of the congregation.

For example, recall Gail Berger from Gloria Dei Lutheran, who described how housing unaffordability affects members of her congregation. Gloria Dei's younger membership consists of five couples. Four of them, Berger says, have been able to rent or own houses due to parental support. The fifth, however, does not have the benefit of extra help in the housing market:

We have one couple though from Europe and they are currently in rental accommodation. Two small children. And they're now ready to leave because they can't find a place they can afford to live in. They both have professional jobs. And that is the nightmare. It's not like they're broke by any means, no. And so that's one of the realities to be sure, about the cost of housing.

The "nightmare" Berger describes includes individual implications, where a young, dual income professional family struggles to afford housing. It also includes institutional implications, as it becomes clear that housing pressures are a significant barrier for the church to renew its ageing membership.

In contrast, Presbyterians all over Metro Vancouver have been encouraged by stories of how church provided housing has enabled church participation. The redevelopment of Central Presbyterian Church includes forty-five units of non-market rental for seniors. Aicken knows some of the church members now living in those units personally. "Some of our people have moved into that [building], needing to move into it, and they're tremendously grateful," he says. "You can't shut them up about how amazing it is". When I was invited to tour the Central Presbyterian development, my guides were two long time members of the congregation who had recently moved into the church housing units. They eat meals together and share their excess storage space with each other. They have a deep sense of community and enjoy being an elevator ride away

from their worship gatherings. The church has ensured that some of their most committed members will be able to continue playing their part in the congregation, rather than needing to move out of the neighbourhood in search of alternative affordable seniors housing.

## **Building for belonging and community**

Beyond building units of housing, the majority of interview participants connected housing development with the mission to nurture belonging and community. Glover clearly articulated the connection between church landownership and building a community and belonging:

Theologically, the purpose of the church owning the land is only to facilitate ministry within the context that the church is found, as it understands its identity as being a sort of respite for persons that are looking for [answers] to the challenges that they're going through in their own lives... as a place that they can belong. Because, you know, everyone has a sort of deep sense of that.

Aicken also emphasized the church's mission to foster belonging. "By virtue of being the church," he says, "[we] should be all about community". For him, housing development is an opportunity to jointly respond to housing needs and many congregation's concerns with the state of social isolation in Vancouver. This same sentiment was reflected by the majority of participants who described their hopes that church designed housing might support and foster connection and community among residents.

If church-built housing were designed to express the church's mission, many participants emphasized that it would involve significant communal space in order to build social connections. The following excerpts provide a sense of the detailed vision for community-supporting design:

I should say that this housing society has always seen itself as providing more than simply housing, and also trying to cultivate a sense of community among the tenants. So we've put a high premium on having common spaces like this library or there's a coffee room across the way and there's the big multi purpose room in this building. That's been very important to us (Seidl).

This building was designed for connection, for community. Everything from the room we're sitting in right now, which is just kind of a reading room, where people can have quiet conversations, to a full community kitchen

that, although folks still have their own kitchen in their unit, they're invited to come and use and eat with others (Moss).

I think that a building that allows people to come together, where there are not just gathering spaces but where there are spaces where people will gather. Two different things altogether. This is a designated gathering space, well that's great, but where will they really gather? ... I think we can underestimate the challenge involved in making community happen. And we can overestimate people's capacity to just do it spontaneously (Johnson).

Values for community, according to these descriptions, are reflected in the design of buildings with above average ratios of common spaces. By emphasizing these elements as different from "just housing", participants imply that a design value for fostering community is part of what makes church provided housing unique.

Notably, participants recognize the difficulty to reconcile community centered design with goals to generate the highest profit or the greatest numbers of units. This tension was repeatedly acknowledged, especially for participants who had experience negotiating funding agreements. A few participants described slow, painful processes of advocating for this value with project partners. The 127 Housing Society for Housing, for example, has made difficult decisions not to develop more housing in partnership with the City of Vancouver because the current funding conditions do not, in their view, allow for adequate common space. Building community through redevelopment is not easy for mission informed churches, as negotiating with partners with different standards can be a significant barrier to implementing their vision.

### **5.3. Responding to barriers through capacity building**

Interview participants demonstrated an awareness that their congregations exist in a specific planning and real estate development context. When asked about barriers to redevelopment, participants discussed limited knowledge of development models, uncertain relationships with developers, planners, and council—as well as the congregational limitations discussed above. While these themes reinforce findings from Chapter 4 on the influence of the market and policy context, they also point to congregational desires to build greater agency to overcome barriers in order to fulfill their mission. By responding to contextual barriers with desires for building internal capacity,

participants express desires for their congregations to be active agents in the redevelopment process.

## **Understanding development models**

Many participants shared a desire to learn about other churches' experience with development in order to fill out their understanding of what the process could look like. Seeing what's been done elsewhere, hearing stories of other developments, and learning the names of partners others have worked with are concrete ways church leaders can build their confidence:

I think a lot of churches have a desire, in terms of building their confidence, a desire to understand what has been done and, in their particular context, what can be done. They can go and say, okay, we can do this, we can get this done, and we can do this in this period of time. Just that knowledge is going to be helpful to parishes in the short run (Glover).

Learning through stories helps define parameters and feasibility for a project, which in turn generates a "can do" attitude.

Johnson made a direct link between knowledge of existing models and a church's confidence to redevelop: "What are the barriers? Lack of confidence. And it's probably authentic self-knowledge that, no, we are not experts in these areas. We need expert assistance." He continued, that although he had "enumerated many models" of previous redevelopments in our conversation, he didn't think "that they're well understood by a parish like St James'," or even a great part of Anglican clergy. In this comment, lack of confidence is due to lack of development expertise. He suggests that sharing stories of previous redevelopment projects is part of building confidence: "I think people need to know we're doing things! We've done this. We've done it successfully. We've changed people's lives by doing it. A lot, hundreds and hundreds of people's lives have been changed because they had stable, safe, clean, decent, dignified housing." While he acknowledges the need for expert assistance, learning about existing redevelopments is discussed jointly as a solution to lacking confidence, indicating churches' desire to learn about their options rather than rely exclusively on expert advice.

For example, the story of the redevelopment of Central Presbyterian Church in the West End of Vancouver has generated a lot of attention within the Presbyterian denomination and beyond. Aicken recalls that conversations about property redevelopment were rather closed among Presbyterians until Central's story started making rounds. Though he is aware that some churches had attempted to join forces to redevelop several years before, those conversations had never amounted to actual projects. Things are different since Jim Smith, Central's minister, has begun sharing his congregation's experience of redevelopment and conducting tours of their brand new building. Aicken senses the impact this model is having on motivations to redevelop:

I think that model, from downtown, is going to have reverberations through the church, and there is a move to use the resource that we have in terms of property in the direction of housing... [Central's congregation was] experiencing diminishment. They were just about to go out of existence. They are now in a rich looking new building with a beautiful worship space, with no mortgage and being able to provide housing for people who live there. They have some sustainability for the future. So it's a delightful model, I think no matter what you're looking for, it's there. And I think other churches will note that and be part of it.

As congregations are inspired by this new model, several churches have begun considering whether the model might be replicated in their neighbourhood, and, when finding zoning restrictions, having conversations about what else might be possible. Stories of successful projects has been a spark for proactivity towards redevelopment.

Another advantage of learning about existing models is that it can demonstrate in very tangible ways that redevelopment projects are not one-size-fits all. Some redevelopment projects include downtown towers with a mix of affordable rental and market rate condos. Others are much smaller, offering one to two dozen units of transitional housing for people with special designations. Others yet will include commercial space, child care space, or space for social enterprise and non-profits. One church leader once told me, while discussing existing church redevelopments, "It doesn't need to be a [tower like downtown]. There are village models. There's all kinds of possibility". While some churches start out looking for models in order to assess whether their church can replicate them, they quickly learn that no two redevelopment projects are alike. This exploratory learning process can result in an increased sense of agency to develop a project that suits the congregation's mission.

## **Distrust of developers**

When it comes to professional expertise, churches vary in the degree of control they want to share with partners. Some tend towards trusting experts and wish to contract out the majority of the redevelopment process. Terri Harrison, who leads the redevelopment branch of the United Church of Canada, tends in this direction (May, 2020). She claims that redevelopment is not a “do-it-yourself” project and should be mostly left in the hands of professionals. Her team has worked with Colliers Intl in partnership with BC Housing. When working on a project, they take charge of a church’s development project from start to finish.

Others believe that strong projects have high degrees of ownership and buy-in from congregations, which requires active involvement of church members. On the other side of the spectrum, Grandview Church involved between 60 to 80 community members in the process of developing the Co:Here project. This was an intentional choice, according to Kathi Benthall, a member of the Co:Here Foundation Board of Directors:

I remember when I said, “I think we need to do this ourselves and not go to a tried and true organization.” It was like, whoah, okay. Then we have to go challenge by challenge (*The Co:Here Story*, 2020).

With a disclaimer that their congregation was unique in having some of the in-house experience the project required—including many young volunteers from outside the congregation and members with city planning expertise, legal backgrounds, construction businesses, and experience in non-profit housing management—it remained a value-based decision to involve as many people as possible in the project.

The majority of interview participants fell somewhere between these two extremes. They expressed a desire for internal capacity building but were also willing to work with development professionals. Every component of redevelopment is a field of expertise in itself—from negotiating funding agreements, to financial planning, to rezoning and council hearings, to managing relationships with architects, developers, and construction managers. Given the lack of experience in the development field within churches, church-developer relationships are often characterized by caution, skepticism, and, distrust of developers.

Gloria Dei Lutheran's redevelopment journey illustrates why some churches might approach development partners and municipalities with trepidation. This North Shore congregation, as we have seen, is not far from closing their doors. They have been exploring selling their property for several years in hopes that a development deal might leave a positive legacy for the community. While retaining ownership is not a priority for them, they hope that a new community serving structure could replace their ageing building and continue to be used by the many local organizations that rent their space throughout the week. They would also like to contribute to housing affordability solutions in the community.

According to Berger, interactions with real estate partners and the municipality have been regular sources of doubt about their redevelopment prospects. Starting with their first attempt to find a development partner, the Gloria Dei congregation experienced blows to their confidence. "The problem is that trying to sell a church is not that simple", she learned. "The real estate agent made that pretty clear. For us, we're in a terrible location". These initial talks discouraged the congregation. Later negotiations with another developer were more promising, restoring confidence that there was still value in Gloria Dei's property. A prospective partner intended to rebuild a smaller church and develop a care facility for seniors on the rest of the property. Discouragement became optimism. Berger and the rest of the congregation were delighted to hear from the new partner that "we, in fact, are guaranteed quite a bit of money" because of the church's property value, which they believed would give them "a lot of freedom to do as we want with it." The congregation followed this lead for over a year. When I followed up with Berger in the spring of 2020, she informed me that City Council had rejected the project. The congregation was again experiencing doubt, and a fair dose of frustration, about their hopes for a lasting legacy.

This trial and error process reveals how the capacity gap in the faith sector is not necessarily addressed by real estate professionals and planning institutions. Being unaware of the market value of their property, leaders from Gloria Dei were easily convinced by real estate players of a lack of options. Then, entering future negotiations with low levels of confidence, they were pleasantly surprised to learn that their property did have significant value. Later, they presented a project to their City Council and were sent back to square one. Without adequate understanding of the development field, their

property's real market value, and their rezoning potential, how can a congregation accurately judge their redevelopment prospects?

The sense of caution with regards to developers is especially pointed due to the fear that the goodwill and social mission of the church will be unfairly exploited for financial gain. The tension that exists in the church-developer relationship is captured by Johnson:

I'm so glad you're doing this because, from a personal point of view, developers, I mean, we need developers in this world. But they can be so predatory. They tend to see everything as just an investment opportunity and what the return is going to be over two or three years or four or five years as they develop a project. And we are sitting ducks. Well intentioned people. Some parishes and some churches and some faith groups who are much smaller—like other organizations that have properties where the congregations have dwindled to nothing—not all of them are astute .

As Johnson explains, developers are seen as necessary partners for churches seeking to redevelop. The problems he sees are that developers are profit driven, “predatory”, and don't share the mission and values orientation of churches. In addition, he notes that churches are not equipped to engage with developers astutely. His sentiment, “I'm so glad you're doing this”, hints at a hope that the church-developer relationship can be improved by building the capacity of churches to guard their interests.

## **Municipal staff and council**

The municipality is another unavoidable player in a church property redevelopment, with the ability to either enable or oppose church led projects. At the bare minimum, municipal staff is involved in granting building permits and enforcing bylaws. At times, staff can be a resource for church leaders who need guidance in the process, though staff turnover can make it a frustrating relationship to manage. Often, rezoning applications involve public hearings prior to council votes. Church rezoning applications have a tendency to attract public attention and press coverage, adding an element of political unpredictability to city council's support.

City Council can play an important role in supporting church redevelopment projects, especially when neighbourhood opposition comes into play. According to Marquardt, St Margaret's proposal to build housing for persons with mental illness

received opposition from neighbours. She shares the following reflection about City Council's support of the project:

Had to go through zoning as well, and, you know, had some of the typical responses of people equating mental illness with all sorts of issues, pedophilia, fear, etc., but we were able to allay those fears. City Council supported completely and then over the years we haven't had any complaints. All the time I was there, so 1995 until the time I left in 2008, there was never any complaint from any neighbours.

In this case, City Council supported a development despite community concerns.

At other times, the municipality has been a less positive player. Zoning and municipal regulations are intimidating barriers for church leaders with little experience of municipal processes. One pastor I spoke to, whose church is in the City of New Westminster, was disappointed by city staff's feedback to their redevelopment proposal. Staff informed her that their project wasn't compatible with the recently passed Community Area Plan and was unlikely to receive council approval. This was confusing new information, since she was aware that both mayor and council had publicly endorsed affordable housing development. She hoped that community engagement would encourage neighbours to publicly support the project, but, without city staff on her side, she feared her dedicated team of church leaders might be in over their heads.

Relationships with municipal staff can have discouraging effects or can enhance a congregation's sense of agency and confidence. The case of the Central Presbyterian Church redevelopment shows that a supportive municipal staff can be very motivational for a congregation. City staff lent valuable expertise to Central church leaders, acting as proactive leaders in the project.

Central church was very fortunate in that the city hopped right on board with that and became partner with the church... The city said, 'yes, yes, yes! We'll do it. Here's the money, we'll go, we'll lead the meetings, everything'. So Central was very motivated by the fact that the city was very cooperative (Aicken).

This quote describes a municipality who had a lot of ownership over the project, encouraging the church to move forward confidently. In this case, congregational agency came not only from within the congregation, but also from a relationship with an external partner.

## 5.4. Co:Here Case Study

### A parish vision for the neighbourhood

In 1988, Grandview Calvary Baptist Church “looked as if it was ready for the funeral dirge” (Ringma, 2011, p. x). A decade of decline had brought the once lively congregation of 150 members down to fifty or sixty. In many ways, the congregation was on track to follow the lead of other churches that had closed down in their neighbourhood over the past three decades. Pastor Tim Dickau, in his account of the church’s “revitalization and reconfiguration” (Ringma, 2011, p. x), describes the state of the congregation when he first began working there. The remaining members, mostly seniors who lived outside of the neighbourhood, “had lost a vision for the future” (Dickau, 2011, p. 5). One member noted the maintenance approach that prevented them from “doing something” in order to survive: “the goal was just to stay alive” (p. 5). A revisioning process compelled the congregation to try something new.

The core of Grandview Church’s new direction was a recovered “parish vision for the good of the neighbourhood” (Regent Exchange, 2016), which exemplifies the theme of reconnecting vision with the surrounding community. Theologian and social activist Charles Ringma describes the parish church approach adopted by Grandview as follows:

This is a church as the people of God in Christ living in a particular neighborhood for which they assume a priestly and missional responsibility. This means that many of the people who worship at Grandview Calvary Baptist church live in the neighbourhood where the church building is located. Many walk to church. This is their turf. And many have deliberately relocated into the neighborhood to be part of the church’s communal life and mission (Ringma, 2011, p. xi).

This missional commitment to the Grandview Woodlands neighbourhood has attracted a diverse membership of three hundred members, which includes: many young families as well as seniors; members from thirty countries and six continents; members who are homeless; and members with high earning professional jobs (Dickau, 2011; Grandview Church, n.d.).

At a Regent Exchange event in 2016, Dickau connected Grandview Church’s parish vision and the story of the Co:Here development. The public event, hosted by

Regent College, a Vancouver-based theological school, featured several guest speakers on the theme of “Churches and the Housing Crisis” (Regent Exchange, 2016). Dickau situates the church’s housing initiatives within a broader congregational response to social needs and injustices in the Grandview neighbourhood: a weekly community meal and shelter; a social enterprise developer called Just Work; a home for refugee claimants; a support group for single mothers; an activist group; and an urban retreat centre. One the most distinctive features of the parish vision has been the congregation’s commitment to “develop a thicker shared life together in a culture of individualism and loneliness”. This commitment has led many congregants to experiment with intentional community living and extend hospitality towards those who “live on or near the streets”.

The story of the Co:Here development on Grandview Church’s former parking lot illustrates how a community-responsive mission and a strong sense of congregational agency led to a housing project that intentionally subverts housing norms. In a video that documents the story of Co:Here (*The Co:Here Story*, 2020), Pastor Joy Banks recalls how her congregation became invested in housing issues:

As the church tried to engage the neighbourhood, a local social worker, actually, asked, “What is your church doing to address homelessness?” Which began a long journey for us as a community of asking that question. “What are we doing?”... [The congregation] began with a simple community meal, got to know folks that were on the street, that were homeless, and through those relationships began discovering what some of the real challenges are.

Over time, a dream to build housing specifically designed to facilitate shared life with these neighbours emerged. In 2001, the congregation developed a vision to use their parking lot towards that end and freely transferred the property to the Co:Here Foundation. This use of congregational resources to address social needs would call upon and develop the congregation’s civic skills over a thirteen year development process, exhibiting the traits of high-agency congregations (Cimino, 2011).

Co:Here’s lengthy development journey demonstrates Grandview Church’s high sense congregational ownership over their vision. Jeannette Moss is the Operations Director of Salsbury Community Society, the non-profit society that manages the Co:Here building. From the beginning of the project, she says, “There wasn’t a sense that it would be easy. It’s been really hard, because it’s really hard! Because we are part

of broken systems.” She attributes the congregation’s willingness tackle these broken systems through a long, difficult project to an organizational culture of ownership. “This isn’t a congregation that’s like, put your money in here and leave and your work is done. It’s like, feet in, skin in the game, many hands, let’s do this.” This culture of ownership reflects an appetite for struggle and the congregation’s existing capacity, both of which had been developed through their many projects over the previous decades.

## **Funding a counter-cultural project**

The Co:Here project welcomed its first residents in 2018. The project contains 26 units of affordable rental units, with the average resident paying fifty five percent of market rental rates. A few units are dedicated to middle-income households whose higher rents help cross-subsidize low-income units. The building’s entire first floor is dedicated to shared communal space, including a community kitchen used to prepare weekly shared meals. The other three stories have eighteen studios, four one-bedroom suites, and four two-bedroom suites among them, as well as additional shared space.

While the congregation’s high level of ownership over the Co:Here vision would turn out to be a strength, it also meant more work and more financial risk for the congregation. It took about ten years from the time Co:Here Foundation obtained the property for the congregation to develop a vision for the project and obtain rezoning approval in 2012. Moss recalls that Grandview Church spent “at least a year if not two years engaging with neighbours [to understand] their concerns for our building” before the city approved their rezoning application. It took \$12 million dollars and another six years before the first residents moved in.

From the beginning of the project, in order for Co:Here to be managed according to the congregation’s vision, BC Housing’s potential involvement was limited to the capital project. Not having BC Housing as an operating partner meant more financial risk and more fundraising for the congregation. Moss justifies this added challenge by returning to the vision for the type of community Grandview Church wanted to build at Co:Here:

One thing [we] realized early on was that [we] wanted to make this building for the people of this neighbourhood. We worked really hard in ensuring that [we] would have high ownership of who would live here.... [We] wanted

to run the building and run it on [our] own terms. And so some of the criteria of the people living here is that they have a history, they have roots in this neighbourhood.

Here, Moss links the commitment to maintaining “high ownership” of the building and running it “on [our] own terms” with the need for the congregation to work “really hard” to uphold their vision.

Other challenges resulted from the congregation’s desire for the project to embody their vision for “mutual transformation”. The project wasn’t only about providing shelter to people who needed it. It was also about extending the vision “that love and community are possible between all people” and “to inspire the imagination in others for shared life with the stranger” (Regent Exchange, 2016; Salisbury Community Society, n.d.). Integral to the project, says Moss, was the plan to include units for middle-income families who would commit to “participating more intentionally in community” for a few years. This vision emerged from the congregation’s intent to subvert “the medical model of care and develop our own philosophy of care, which is really about power with instead of power over”. This philosophy didn’t fit the criteria of many potential funders. “We really had to do a lot of convincing and had to have a lot of face time with people about the project, and articulate and rearticulate and rearticulate the importance of the project”, says Moss. “A lot of people that we did ask for funding just simply said no.”

Another reason the project’s funding was a challenge was simply due to the fact that the building did not maximize rent. The project was not “designed to create and generate the most revenue”, says Moss, “we didn’t fit a unit in every nook and cranny”. The vision to raise sufficient money to avoid maxing out density was tied, again, with both extra time and effort:

It just took a lot of convincing. We just couldn’t fit in people’s boxes. For [funders with whom] we had face to face conversations, we didn’t have one, we had half a dozen. And it just took longer to communicate our vision.

Developing the Co:Here project, says Moss, was a long, expensive process, resulting in a relatively small building, “but we really believe that the quality of the building will play out in terms of people’s potential to flourish here”. In his telling of the Co:Here story, Dickau speaks to the need for churches to intentionally counter the commodification of housing. While he mentions many options for churches to do that, the building of homes

that prioritize human flourishing over cost-effectiveness is one way his congregation has chosen to subvert the dominant model of commodified housing.

## **Moving through obstacles**

Co:Here's redevelopment journey reinforces suggestions that a neighbourhood-informed vision and visionary leadership are important components of a successful church redevelopment project. Moss recalls how relationships with housing insecure people in the community informed the vision for the project quite directly.

We have video footage of people, some of which sadly aren't even with us anymore but people who were on the street and who... could dream of living in a place like this where they could lock their door and cook a simple meal but they could also come downstairs and sit by the fire place and have a conversation with someone.

These relationships, Moss says, kept the congregation grounded, making sure they "weren't just *talking* about affordability and about housing people with complex histories", and keeping them accountable to being responsive to people's expressed needs. Being connected to the community strengthened the congregation's sense of mission and provided strong motivation to overcome the many barriers they would face.

Moss confirms that leaders who hold the project's vision were central to the project's success. "And like I said it doesn't mean people with [development] expertise, [but] people who are holding the vision. You need people who remind you why you're doing it". She also describes how their leaders played an essential role in communicating the vision to project partners:

I think we have exceptional leaders... people who have been around a long time, that have a lot of experience, people who could really lead the project that caught the vision early on, and could communicate in a way that a developer needed to hear, in a way that a construction consultant needed to hear, in a way that a donor needed to hear.

These leaders safeguarded the project's vision, communicating both internally to the congregation and externally with partners. In this regard, Moss acknowledged that her church was probably "unique" in having such strong in-house leadership.

Grandview Church also learned that other types of leaders, who could take on smaller tasks, were drawn to the project's strong vision. The project benefited from sixty

to eighty volunteer leaders throughout various stages. She reflects on the way that the redevelopment process attracted and developed new leadership within their congregation:

Vancouver is teeming with people who are interested and want to talk about housing. It may not be people with the experience. We had a lot of people who did a lot of learning on the job. They were young and they were keen to support and work out this vision. So I think having conversations with people outside of your own circle and community to draw in expertise is great.

This experience of recruiting volunteers from “outside of your own circle” reinforces the benefit of a project emerging from a connection to community and a strong vision. Having a vision that was firmly rooted in the surrounding community, according to Moss, allowed the church to attract the leaders it needed to carry out the various tasks along the way.

## **What makes Co:Here so unique?**

Comparing Co:Here to other church development projects reveals many distinctive elements of the project. From a design perspective, the project has an unusually high amount of shared living space (almost fifty percent) but offers no additional ancillary space for the church partner. This also means it offers one of the lowest number of units of all Vancouver church-led redevelopment projects. From a real estate development perspective, it is the product of a slow and expensive process, has an unusually high number of project funders, offers no investment opportunities, and will not yield significant rents. It is the only Vancouver church redevelopment with a majority of social housing units, and one of the rare few that has been accomplished without the sale of church property. Finally, of all the church redevelopment projects Vancouver has seen in the past decade, Co:Here is the only project that was not built to finance a new or restored worship space.

Below these surface-level project details, what really differentiates Co:Here from other church redevelopments is the Grandview Church congregation. Rather than being led by a small, ageing congregation in decline, Co:Here emerged from a large, diverse, and active congregation. Two decades of renewal in the Grandview congregation had resulted in a congregation that had a powerful sense of connection to its neighbourhood,

many relationships with housing insecure neighbours, and a proven track record of responding to neighbourhood needs. The congregation had strong leaders and many young, high-capacity and committed members who could draw from professional experience and networks to advance the project—a significant advantage when compared to the capacity and energy that a senior congregation might bring to a project. Whereas many redevelopment projects are led by small committees who occasionally update the larger congregation (Erdman, 2020), the Co:Here project generated a high degree of ownership among a large portion of the congregation. The Co:Here project was not a strategy to revitalize Grandview Church or reinvent its mission. It was an intentional mobilization of the congregation’s resources to expand a pre-articulated and already-implemented vision.

## **Conclusion**

Congregational agency—its absence, presence, or its pursuit—shapes the way churches engage with their redevelopment journey. For some church leaders, many years of decline has brought up questions about their congregation’s relevance in the community; they feel that redefining their vision and mission must be a preliminary step to redevelopment, that they do not have the agency to act without this sense of direction. Other leaders have visions to reconnect congregational mission to the surrounding community; they see redevelopment as a tangible way they can be agents of change in their neighbourhood, or at least a way to re-shape their presence. Barriers to redevelopment include unclear vision, lacking guidance, and low confidence. Yet participants express a desire to develop agency by overcoming these barriers. Perhaps, for them, redevelopment presents an opportunity to exercise agency.

The case study of the Co:Here development by Grandview Church presents an ideal of a mission-aligned, non-market housing development. A clear vision, strong leadership, and in-house development knowledge helped nurture high levels of participation and ownership over the project. These strengths enabled the congregation to work hard to achieve their vision, even though a different project would have been easier, faster, and less expensive to realize. While illustrating what is possible when a congregation has a strong sense of agency, it would be hard to argue that the Co:Here project is easily replicable. As the story of Grandview makes clear, the church decided to pursue housing development after 25 years of congregational growth and renewal. This

observation doesn't bode well for congregations in decline that hope that redevelopment will be the path to renewal. It even raises questions about whether this level of mission-alignment in a project is feasible for a congregation in decline.

Can external support help speed up the development of congregational agency? Several participants referred to the "long journey" of redevelopment. They indicated that leadership from outside the congregation, whether from the denomination or a development partner, city staff or another community organization, could help with the process. Relationships with such partners can evidently develop congregational agency. Capacity-building initiatives within the CHS are already emerging to respond to this need (May, 2020). However, this chapter also illustrates that certain elements of agency are derived from a congregation's vision and mission. There is little evidence that a congregation's mission can come from external players.

## Chapter 6. Discussion and conclusion

This thesis has examined church property redevelopments in Vancouver with the goal of unearthing the interests of real estate, urban planning, and congregational players driving this growing trend. Church redevelopment projects necessarily implicate these three sectors and reflect the interplay of their respective interests. A historical perspective has demonstrated that church organization's involvement in urban development has been responsive to shifting economic and policy contexts. Whereas the dominant model of church housing development during the Keynesian welfare era involved partnerships between state actors and faith-based non-profits, real estate has replaced stated actors as church's development partners of choice under neoliberal governance. Therefore, church led developments increasingly reflect the real estate sector's interests to develop market rate housing. With senior governments largely absent from municipal housing policy, these projects generally reflect urban planning strategies that rely on zoning and policy incentives to encourage the private and third sectors to meet municipal planning goals.

An analysis of Vancouver church redevelopments between 2006 and 2020 has revealed the goals these development participants prioritize. The real estate sector has almost always gained a portion of church property through these redevelopments. Out of 23 projects identified in Appendix A, only Grandview Church, Lakewood United Multicultural, Oakridge Lutheran Church, and St Mary's Catholic Parish have not resulted in a transfer of property to a market developer<sup>7</sup>. Profit generating developments dominate all projects that include private real estate developers, including both the private real estate and church-developer partnership development types. Strata condominiums and market rental are the preferred residential types of these projects, and three also include luxury hotels or retail space.

The City of Vancouver has also clearly benefited from church redevelopments. Plans and policies cited in rezoning and development documents reveal the urban planning interests that have shaped these projects, including: development of purpose

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<sup>7</sup> Our Lady of Perpetual Help Catholic Parish may also manage to retain landownership through a partnership with Columbus Homes, but not enough has been announced about this project to include it in this category.

built rental, inclusion of affordable housing, retention of community serving space, provision of community amenities such as childcare, and heritage preservation. Since it has historically been difficult to rezone church property, it is likely that urban planning departments can exert particular influence over a rezoning application on church property.

Municipalities can expect significant public benefit to justify rezoning a community serving space. Therefore, private real estate projects are more likely to be successful in the rezoning process if they help meet urban planning goals. For example, the City of Vancouver has set targets to grow its purpose built rental stock. Accordingly, a great many church redevelopments have proposed market rental developments, with rezoning documents citing policies such as the Short Term Incentives for Rental (City of Vancouver, n.d.-j), the Moderate Income Rental Pilot Program (City of Vancouver, n.d.-k), the Affordable Housing Choices Interim Rezoning Policy (City of Vancouver, n.d.-o), and the Secured Market Rental Housing Policy (City of Vancouver, n.d.-h). Other housing-related policies such as residential densification have also been significant for multiple church redevelopments, including those that fall within the Cambie Corridor Plan.

How have congregational interests been revealed through church redevelopment projects? Rezoning documents reinforce the narrative that dominates news articles and scholarly literature (Erdman, 2020): churches are struggling to survive in contemporary society, and they cannot afford to maintain their buildings unless they unlock the market potential of their properties through real estate development. The primary gain for churches in redevelopment projects is a fairly even split between the restoration of a heritage building and the construction of a new worship space, which may indicate that managing a church building is at the centre of a congregation's interests. Two projects by Catholic parishes have a similar interest in upgrading school properties. In addition, nine projects include social housing or below-market rental units for the church. This means that slightly more than half of the sixteen projects that involve a congregation have demonstrated some interest in affordable housing, but almost as many have either not considered affordable housing as part of their interests or have not managed to protect that interest.

Interviews revealed another dimension of congregational interests not conveyed by development documents. Congregational mission is a central element of church redevelopment projects, a dimension that is obscured in mainstream narratives. Interview participants described a laborious process of reimagining congregational mission in conjunction, or ideally prior to pursuing redevelopment. This theme indicates that redevelopment is more than a financial decision, and housing development not merely a means to an end. Rather, redevelopment of property is a parallel process to the redevelopment of mission. Doubts about congregations' capacity to defend their missional interests through redevelopment process are tied to cautious engagement with real estate and urban planning sectors.

This project has identified contradictions between the congregational interests revealed by analyzing church development documents and those discussed by interview participants. According to Knigge & Cope (2006), the contradictory evidence of multiple methodologies "can be simultaneously contradictory and yet both 'true'" (p. 2028). Discrepancies in interpretations represent different views about reality, which "represent new areas for exploration" (p. 2028). Another recent Vancouver-based study of church redevelopments indicates that it is indeed worth paying attention to this narrative gap:

The primary motivations shared concentrated on the opportunities for extending [their church's] mission and for serving their communities in new and expanded ways. There was a keen-ness to ensure that this 'side of the story' was brought to light, rather than they viewed as the 'typical', limited view of congregations trying to survive (Erdman, 2020, p. 107).

Evidently, the incompatibility of narratives and meanings ascribed to church redevelopments is not only consistent, but also concerning to the faith sector.

One of the purposes of this research has been to reveal contradictory interests of various parties to church redevelopment. Real estate, urban planning, and faith sectors are finding common ground through redevelopment projects, but my goal was to question and problematize the "win-win-win" narrative that follows stories of church redevelopment. Rather than describing these projects as uniformly beneficial, it is worth distinguishing among the ways involved parties benefit. Power differentials, in both ideology and practice, are revealed by assessing how each sector shapes the outcomes and meanings associated with church redevelopment projects. While these differences in ideology and interests may not necessarily be barriers to partnerships, it is especially

important for congregations to be aware of these differences. At a time where many congregations are expressing the need for a fresh vision and mission for the future, they are rightly cautious of potential partners that claim mutual self-interests and win-win scenarios.

## **A case for mission-driven development**

In the midst of uncertainty about the future of urban churches, some may see redevelopment as a strategy that buys congregations time to work out a contemporary mission. Some are optimistic that the redeveloped building will attract new members or that rents collected from housing developments will revitalize the congregation's programs (Erdman, 2020). Perhaps they are waiting for this new, revitalized congregation to set the course for a new mission. Some are hopeful that housing for senior members of their congregation will hold the church together. Perhaps they hope that, once maintenance costs are no longer a concern, their present membership will have gained a decade or two to rebuild the congregation. While it is too soon to discount these hopes, it is worth noting that this strategy of redevelopment without mission has some risks.

The first risk is that a congregation that sells parts of its property would come to regret it. With the growth of community housing and social purpose real estate sectors in BC, it is likely that new development innovations will soon be more established and less risky. A congregation, like the one Pastor Greg refers to in Chapter 4, who sells property now may later learn that other options would have been preferable. Additionally, there are strong limits to the strategy of selling property to maintain a church, since it cannot be replicated many times.

A second risk involves negatively altering the role and reputation of the congregation in the community. Acting in closer partnership real estate partners may associate the congregation with the for-profit sector. Adopting a business model for church finances might also have internal repercussions for the congregation. On one hand, it might nurture a service-provider-to-client relationship between church staff and members as members have reduced collective financial and governance responsibilities. On the other hand, it could redirect human resources into maintaining the new balance sheet rather than directing them towards mission work. If not carefully considered, this

could represent a significant shift in mission towards housing provision that could be difficult to undo. It is important for congregations to carefully consider whether having a reputation as a real estate developer or housing provider will be counter productive to the community serving identity they are seeking to cultivate.

A third risk is that a redevelopment project might further drain a congregation's human and financial resources and then not work out. Several of the projects reviewed in this study took near a decade of work. They often demanded the energies of congregation's highest capacity leaders. Long-term projects predictably create pressures within congregations that might bring some internal conflicts. Especially for congregations that describe a lack of strong leadership, these relational pressures might result in stalled or abandoned projects. Financially, churches may spend significant capital on early stages of the project, adding additional pressure for success. Once the congregation has its new building, a sense of collective accomplishment, and fewer financial worries, these risks might be easily forgotten. What happens to the congregation if the project is not successful within a satisfactory time frame? The case of Pacific Spirit Church, who lost their development partner after a downturn in the economy, offers a strong caution that redevelopment might be much longer and much more expensive a project than first anticipated.

These risks emphasize how important it is for a congregation to be clear about its mission. Religious ecology scholars have found that "religious institutions that create a process to understand... their history, mission, and ministry—as well as cooperation, not competition, with civic and religious community members—are better able to ascertain the needs of their congregations and community" (Cimino et al., 2012, p. 19) . Accordingly, congregations who have clarity about how redevelopment will serve their mission are more likely to take on the risks involved in redevelopment. They are also less likely to take on risks that threaten their core of their mission. For example, in Mian's (2012) case study of Trinity Lutheran Church, a congregation decides to engage in a capital campaign to renovate their building because partnership with a private developer is seen as a means that contradicts their primary mission. In other instances, "development-related activities may be business-oriented, but they are still mandated by a social justice perspective in which both the community and the institution benefit" (Cimino et al., p. 12). In either case, the question of whether the 'ends justify the means' is determined through the lens of the congregation's mission.

The unknown variable of congregational mission makes it difficult to answer this project's secondary research question: Are there factors that influence a congregation's likelihood of pursuing mission-driven, non-market development? Broadly speaking, the degree of clarity a congregation has about its mission is among the most significant factor. Other factors may include awareness of redevelopment options, opportunities to work with non-market development partners, and the existence of municipal policies that incentivize non-market development. The congregation's capacity to take on risks may also be significant. Yet, while these factors could be said to generally support mission-driven, non-market development, they can only do so if a congregation believes that a non-market model aligns with their mission.

With only nine of the sixteen church led projects in this study offering non-market housing options, it is difficult to claim that affordable housing provision is a consistent missional priority for congregations. Is this due to a lack of opportunities for non-market development? Does it demonstrate that some congregations do not see affordable housing provision as part of their mission? Does it reflect a lack of understanding about the impacts of market driven real estate development? Or does it capture the lack of missional clarity described by participants in this study? Further research is required to understand how church congregations relate to affordable housing provision.

## **Reality check: the slow road to a new mission**

The importance of aligning redevelopment with organizational mission has been stressed by actors outside of the faith community. Robert Brown, Vice President of the non-profit developer Catalyst Community Development Society, claims that church redevelopment projects "work best if the project is aligned with the mission" (Bula, 2019). Likewise, the Building It Right Toolkit developed by Vancity Community Foundation encourages organizations to "clarify and solidify your organization's mission" before contemplating redevelopment because mission informs major decisions throughout a redevelopment process. The toolkit specifically states that "if your organization's mission is at all uncertain and in a process of changing this should be resolved first before you begin to seriously contemplate redevelopment" (Vancity Community Foundation, n.d., p. 2). Aligning redevelopment with mission and vision not only supports project success but is also "preserves and increases the stock of affordable property available for, and dedicated to, community benefit and service" (May, 2020, p. 7).

The challenges involved in clarifying and solidifying a congregation's mission are easily underestimated. For instance, the Building it Right Toolkit suggests that the process should take one to three months, a timeline that is likely unrealistic for many churches. As participants in this study described, shifting a congregation's mission and vision is an emotionally loaded process, involving many people who may have multi-generational investment in the current way of doing things. Processes of reflecting on the congregation's current mission and community can take a long time as they are often led by volunteers with limited time and capacity to dedicate to the task. They can often also require theological work, a process of re-examining the congregation's beliefs about God and the purpose of the congregation. These are understandably complex processes that have implications on every aspect of the congregation.

It is difficult to estimate what a more realistic time frame may be. On the short end, clarifying mission could resemble the one year process that Anglican congregations undertake to create a parish profile when hiring new lead ministers. A longer estimate could be several years. The Grandview Church congregation purchased the land where the Co:Here project now stands in 2002. They considered what a mission-aligned vision for the site might look like for at least three years before transferring the property to the Co:Here Foundation.

Recall that the Grandview congregation held collective ownership of the Co:Here project as a high priority. This value was linked with the tenacity with which the congregation held on to their mission and vision throughout their thirteen year development process. Ownership characterized the development process throughout. The congregation had ownership over the process of identifying the need for housing in their neighbourhood. They had ownership over the process of aligning their mission with their redevelopment project. They had ownership over the design and development process. And finally, they intentionally built a project they would have continued ownership over, by remaining in control of the project and how the building would operate. This process took a long time, but it ensured that the congregation's mission was at the centre of their work and property.

Are there opportunities to support congregations in clarifying and solidifying their mission? I expect that external support may be helpful, but it will need to be done in a way that supports the congregation's ownership over the process. This is an altogether

different process than existing capacity building resources in the CHS, having more to do with congregational development than property development. As participants in this project indicated, many congregations look to denominational bodies for this kind of support. It is also possible that existing peer networks could be leveraged to share successes and challenges with redefining mission.

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## Appendix.

### Inventory of Vancouver church redevelopment projects, 2006-2020

Church Name	Developer/ partner	Type of development	Status	References
Mount Pleasant Baptist Church	n/a	Private real estate development	Completed 2006	City Ritchie, F. (2015, January 8). Vancouver's lost churches. Church for Vancouver. <a href="https://churchforvancouver.ca/vancouvers-lost-churches/">https://churchforvancouver.ca/vancouvers-lost-churches/</a>
Coastal Church	Westbank	Church-developer partnership	Completed 2006	Mondor, P. (2003). CD-1 Rezoning at 1120 West Georgia Street and Heritage Revitalization Agreement at 1160 West Georgia Street (Policy Report No. 03656). City of Vancouver. <a href="https://council.vancouver.ca/20031210/PH3.htm">https://council.vancouver.ca/20031210/PH3.htm</a>
Associated Presbyterian Church	n/a	Private real estate development	Completed 2007	Ritchie, F. (2015, January 8). Vancouver's lost churches. Church for Vancouver. <a href="https://churchforvancouver.ca/vancouvers-lost-churches/">https://churchforvancouver.ca/vancouvers-lost-churches/</a>
St. John United Church	Westbank/ Petersen Group	Private real estate development	Completed 2014	City of Vancouver. (n.d.). Rezoning Application, 1401 Comox Street. Retrieved June 22, 2020, from <a href="https://rezoning.vancouver.ca/applications/1401comox/index.htm#oct2009">https://rezoning.vancouver.ca/applications/1401comox/index.htm#oct2009</a>

Church Name	Developer/ partner	Type of development	Status	References
John Paul II Pastoral Centre	-	Sell-to-build	Completed 2015	<p>Bula, F. (2019, September 7). Vancouver churches leverage land to stay afloat. The Globe and Mail, A16. Retrieved Feb 6, 2020, from <a href="http://proxy.lib.sfu.ca/login?url=https://search.proquest.com/docview/2285551640?accountid=13800">http://proxy.lib.sfu.ca/login?url=https://search.proquest.com/docview/2285551640?accountid=13800</a></p> <p>City of Vancouver. (n.d.). Rezoning and Development Permit Application, 4899 Heather Street (749 West 33rd Avenue) (DE416156). Retrieved June 23, 2020, from <a href="https://rezoning.vancouver.ca/applications/749w33rd/index.htm">https://rezoning.vancouver.ca/applications/749w33rd/index.htm</a></p> <p>Li, B. (2018, October 2). Robson project to transform former archdiocese offices. The B.C. Catholic. <a href="https://bccatholic.ca/news/catholic-van/robson-project-to-transform-former-archdiocese-offices">https://bccatholic.ca/news/catholic-van/robson-project-to-transform-former-archdiocese-offices</a></p>
Grandview Calvary Baptist Church	Co:Here Foundation	Church non-market partnership	Rezoning approved 2012, Completed 2018	<p>Chan, K. (2018, August 28). Affordable rental housing for the homeless opens in East Vancouver. Daily Hive. <a href="https://dailyhive.com/vancouver/co-here-affordable-housing-1723-victoria-drive-vancouver?auto=true">https://dailyhive.com/vancouver/co-here-affordable-housing-1723-victoria-drive-vancouver?auto=true</a></p> <p>City of Vancouver. (n.d.). Rezoning Application, 1870 East 1st Avenue and 1723 Victoria Drive. Retrieved June 22, 2020, from <a href="https://rezoning.vancouver.ca/applications/1870e1st/index.htm">https://rezoning.vancouver.ca/applications/1870e1st/index.htm</a></p>

Church Name	Developer/ partner	Type of development	Status	References
Church of God in Vancouver	South Street Development Group	Church-developer partnership	Rezoning approved 2014, Completed 2018	City of Vancouver. (n.d.). Rezoning Application, 506 West 60th Avenue and 7645-7675 Cambie Street. Retrieved June 22, 2020, from <a href="https://rezoning.vancouver.ca/applications/506w60th/index.htm">https://rezoning.vancouver.ca/applications/506w60th/index.htm</a>
Central Presbyterian	Bosa Properties	Church-developer partnership	Rezoning approved 2014, Completed 2018	City of Vancouver. (n.d.). Rezoning and Development Permit Application, 1155 Thurlow Street (DE417385). Retrieved June 22, 2020, from <a href="https://rezoning.vancouver.ca/applications/1155thurlow/index.htm">https://rezoning.vancouver.ca/applications/1155thurlow/index.htm</a>
Oakridge Lutheran Church	Catalyst Community Development Society	Church non-market partnership	Rezoning approved 2016, Completed 2019	City of Vancouver. (n.d.). Rezoning and Development Permit Application, 5688 Ash Street. Retrieved June 23, 2020, from <a href="https://rezoning.vancouver.ca/applications/5688ash/index.htm">https://rezoning.vancouver.ca/applications/5688ash/index.htm</a>
Knox United Church	Emaar Canada	Church-developer partnership	Rezoning approved 2009	City of Vancouver. (n.d.). Rezoning Application, 3205-3221 West 41st Avenue and 5590 Balaclava Street. Retrieved June 22, 2020, from <a href="https://rezoning.vancouver.ca/applications/3205-3221w41/index.htm">https://rezoning.vancouver.ca/applications/3205-3221w41/index.htm</a>
Kerrisdale Baptist Church	Bogner Development Group	Private real estate development	Rezoning approved 2015	City of Vancouver. (n.d.). Rezoning Application, 2095 West 43rd Avenue. Retrieved June 24, 2020, from <a href="https://rezoning.vancouver.ca/applications/2095w43rdav/index.htm">https://rezoning.vancouver.ca/applications/2095w43rdav/index.htm</a>
Oakridge United Church	Townline Homes	Church-developer partnership	Rezoning approved 2016, Anticipated completion 2020	City of Vancouver. (n.d.). Rezoning Application, 305 West 41st Avenue. Retrieved June 22, 2020, from <a href="https://rezoning.vancouver.ca/applications/305w41st/index.htm">https://rezoning.vancouver.ca/applications/305w41st/index.htm</a>

Church Name	Developer/ partner	Type of development	Status	References
First Baptist Church	Westbank	Church-developer partnership	Rezoning approved 2017, anticipated completion 2022	<p>City of Vancouver. (n.d.). Rezoning Application, 969 Burrard Street &amp; 1019-1045 Nelson Street. Retrieved June 22, 2020, from <a href="https://rezoning.vancouver.ca/applications/969burrard/index.htm">https://rezoning.vancouver.ca/applications/969burrard/index.htm</a></p> <p>Mondor, P. (2005). Rezoning of 955 Burrard Street (Downtown YMCA) and 969 Burrard Street &amp; 1017-1045 Nelson Street (First Baptist Church); DD (G) and RM-5B to CD-1 and Heritage Revitalization Agreement at 955 Burrard Street (No. 04279). <a href="https://council.vancouver.ca/20050315/p4.htm">https://council.vancouver.ca/20050315/p4.htm</a></p>
Vancouver Chinese Presbyterian Church	Wall Financial Group	Church-developer partnership	Rezoning approved 2017, anticipated completion 2022	<p>City of Vancouver. (n.d.). Rezoning Application, 6137 Cambie Street. Retrieved June 22, 2020, from <a href="https://rezoning.vancouver.ca/applications/6137cambie/index.htm">https://rezoning.vancouver.ca/applications/6137cambie/index.htm</a></p>
Pacific Spirit United Church/Dunbar Ryerson United Church	n/a	Church-developer partnership	Rezoning approved 2017	<p>City of Vancouver. (n.d.). Rezoning Application, 2165-2195 and 2205-2291 West 45th Avenue, Feedback. Retrieved June 22, 2020, from <a href="https://rezoning.vancouver.ca/applications/2165-2195and2205-2291w45thave/index.htm">https://rezoning.vancouver.ca/applications/2165-2195and2205-2291w45thave/index.htm</a></p>
Catholic Charities Shelter/RCAV	Amacon	Private real-estate development	Rezoning approved 2018	<p>City of Vancouver. (n.d.). Rezoning Application, 118-150 Robson Street. Retrieved June 24, 2020, from <a href="https://rezoning.vancouver.ca/applications/118-150robson/index.htm">https://rezoning.vancouver.ca/applications/118-150robson/index.htm</a></p>
St Mark's Church	Jameson Developments	Private real-estate development	Rezoning approved 2019	<p>City of Vancouver. (n.d.). Rezoning Application, 1805 Larch Street. Retrieved June 22, 2020, from <a href="https://rezoning.vancouver.ca/applications/1805larchst/index.htm">https://rezoning.vancouver.ca/applications/1805larchst/index.htm</a></p>

Church Name	Developer/ partner	Type of development	Status	References
Westpointe Christian Church	Form Projects Inc	Private real-estate development	Rezoning approved 2019	City of Vancouver. (n.d.). Rezoning Application, 2715 West 12th Avenue. Retrieved June 22, 2020, from <a href="https://rezoning.vancouver.ca/applications/2715w12th/index.htm">https://rezoning.vancouver.ca/applications/2715w12th/index.htm</a>
St. Andrew's Wesley United Church <i>1012 Nelson St</i>	-	Sell-to-build	Building permit approved 2019	<p>City of Vancouver. (n.d.). Development Application Information, 1012 Nelson Street—DP-2018-01031. Retrieved June 24, 2020, from <a href="https://development.vancouver.ca/1012nelson/index.htm">https://development.vancouver.ca/1012nelson/index.htm</a></p> <p>Stueck, W. (2002, August 13). Tower secures church's daily bread. The Globe and Mail, B9. Retrieved from: <a href="http://global.factiva.com/redirect/default.aspx?P=sa&amp;an=glob00020020813dy8d00018&amp;cat=a&amp;ep=ASE">http://global.factiva.com/redirect/default.aspx?P=sa&amp;an=glob00020020813dy8d00018&amp;cat=a&amp;ep=ASE</a></p> <p>Todd, D. (2019, March 23). Houses of the Holy: In Vancouver, a union of church and real estate. The Vancouver Sun (Online). <a href="http://proxy.lib.sfu.ca/login?url=https://search.proquest.com/docview/2196152497?accountid=13800">http://proxy.lib.sfu.ca/login?url=https://search.proquest.com/docview/2196152497?accountid=13800</a></p>
Lakewood United Multicultural	BC Housing	Church non-market partnership	Rezoning approved 2020	<p>City of Vancouver. (n.d.). Rezoning Application, 2025 East 12th Avenue and 2776 Semlin Drive. Retrieved June 23, 2020, from <a href="https://rezoning.vancouver.ca/applications/2025e12thave_2776semлиндr/index.htm">https://rezoning.vancouver.ca/applications/2025e12thave_2776semлиндr/index.htm</a></p> <p>United Church of Canada, &amp; Colliers International. (2019). 2776 Semlin Drive Rezoning Application Revised. <a href="https://rezoning.vancouver.ca/applications/2025e12thave_2776semлиндr/documents/2776SemlinDrive-RezoningApplication-RevisedApplicantFINALOHBoards-2019-11-08.pdf">https://rezoning.vancouver.ca/applications/2025e12thave_2776semлиндr/documents/2776SemlinDrive-RezoningApplication-RevisedApplicantFINALOHBoards-2019-11-08.pdf</a></p>
St Mary's Catholic Parish	Columbus Homes	Church non-market partnership	Joyce- Collingwood Plan approved 2017	City of Vancouver. (2017). Joyce-Collingwood Station Precinct Plan. <a href="https://vancouver.ca/files/cov/joyce-collingwood-station-precint-plan.pdf">https://vancouver.ca/files/cov/joyce-collingwood-station-precint-plan.pdf</a>

Church Name	Developer/ partner	Type of development	Status	References
Corpus Christi Catholic Parish	Sunrise Seniors Homes	Sell-to-build & Private development	Rezoning application in stream	<p>City of Vancouver. (n.d.). Development Application Information, 2499 East 48th Avenue—DP-2020-00020. Retrieved June 22, 2020, from <a href="https://development.vancouver.ca/2499e48th/index.htm">https://development.vancouver.ca/2499e48th/index.htm</a></p> <p>City of Vancouver. (n.d.). Development Application Information, 6344 Nanaimo Street—DP-2019-00029. Retrieved June 23, 2020, from <a href="https://development.vancouver.ca/6344nanaimo/index.htm">https://development.vancouver.ca/6344nanaimo/index.htm</a></p> <p>O'Connor, N. (2018, October 31). Former church land in Killarney may be used to build a seniors' care facility. Vancouver Courier. <a href="https://www.vancourier.com/real-estate/former-church-land-in-killarney-may-be-used-to-build-a-seniors-care-facility-images-1.23481367">https://www.vancourier.com/real-estate/former-church-land-in-killarney-may-be-used-to-build-a-seniors-care-facility-images-1.23481367</a></p>
Our Lady of Perpetual Help Parish	Columbus Homes	Church non-market partnership	Pre-development	Ruck. (2019, May 22). Vancouver parish, Knights team up on affordable housing. The B.C. Catholic. <a href="https://bccatholic.ca/news/catholic-van/vancouver-parish-knights-team-up-on-affordable-housing">https://bccatholic.ca/news/catholic-van/vancouver-parish-knights-team-up-on-affordable-housing</a>