
community mapping guide

Good Neighbour, Spring, 2025



Introduction

Over the last few weeks, we've been on a journey of theological reflection to better understand how God sees our neighbours and neighbourhoods. Now, we invite you to take the next step of discipleship: take action by learning about and responding to the needs of your community. We will take an asset-based approach, looking for how God is already at work around you and seeking to come alongside the people and organizations serving your community.

This guide offers four steps you can take to get a deeper understanding of your neighbourhood. For each step, we suggest a particular task to help focus:

- **Learn:** Get a big-picture view of the resources and needs in your neighbourhood.
- **Look:** Step out the door and see your place with fresh eyes.
- **Listen:** Get a better understanding from those who are already at work in your neighbourhood.
- **Launch:** Consider what might be the next step.

This framework is designed to structure your learning, but it does not need to limit your imagination! Don't focus on an end goal as much as a process of collectively seeking out God's heart for your neighbourhood. Stay open to what comes up in conversations and walks as you journey through this process.

For Facilitators:

- This was designed to take approximately one month to complete. We suggest that you meet once all together to do the **Learn** step, then have pairs meet over the next week for **Look**. Over the next two weeks, core leaders will arrange **Listen** conversations with community partners. Finally, you will meet all together for the final **Launch** step.
- Each step will require active facilitation. Review the page before gathering and ensure that you have the requisite supplies.
- If you get stuck, check-in with a pastor for support.

Cover Photo: Lala Azizli for Unsplash

Learn

Prep: Full group | 1 hour | Materials: Large paper or whiteboard, pens or markers, laptops

We've been talking a lot about your *neighbourhood*, but what does that mean? We'll start by defining a place and getting a big picture view of the people, places and things that define it. This stage is best done in a room together with your full group.

1. Set the boundaries: To start, think about where everyone in the group lives and works. Is there a common denominator that connects you? Start naming several possible definitions of the neighbourhood that you will explore throughout this process. Perhaps it is the block around the house where you meet, the stretch of built up storefronts where many of you shop and work, or the officially designated municipal neighbourhood boundary.

2. Draw a map: Put the paper on a table in the centre of the room. Start filling in the details of the place you've set on. Start with major streets and landmarks. Once you've agreed on the overall boundaries, start filling in the map.

Split up and fill in the map with details. Use these as jumping off points:

- **Places:** Fill in the map with the places that are important to you and your neighbours. This might include schools, parks, businesses, nonprofits, churches, community centres, transit, libraries, etc. Use the links below to find social service organizations in your neighbourhood. You might also highlight places that are important even if not positive: payday lenders, dispensaries, or empty storefronts.
- **People:** Get a better sense of who lives in your neighbourhood. You can start with your own impressions (write in the margins of the map), but also draw on the resources listed below to explore demographic data from the census. To start, take a look at the variation in language, income, & employment within your neighbourhood.
- **Institutions:** What makes this place what it is? Perhaps parent teacher associations, business improvement areas, unions, annual festivals, or leaders? These might be harder to pinpoint on a map, but important to the character of your neighbourhood.
- **Atmosphere:** Are there places in the neighbourhood that feel different? Where do people gather? Where does it feel unsafe? What has changed in the last few years- where are businesses opening and closing?

3. Reflect: Step back and take a look at what you've learned. Take a moment to discuss:

- What are the strengths of this place?
- What places bring people together?
- Where are the gaps in places in services?
- Working together, **identify 10 neighbourhood assets.** Assets are things (people, places, organizations, groups, etc) that make your neighbourhood good and strong.

Mapping Template:

What is your neighbourhood?

--

Who lives here?

--

Assets

Name	Description

Take a picture of your map and share it with the group so you can refer back to it!

Resources

- CensusMapper: [Low Income Explorer](#)
- 211 Ontario- Social Service Database: <https://211ontario.ca/search/>
- [Toronto Neighbourhood Profiles](#)
- [Markham Neighbourhood Profiles \(2016\)](#)
- Toronto [Business Improvement Areas](#)

Look

Prep: Partners | 2 hours | Materials: Camera, printout, pen

Getting a bird's eye view of the neighbourhood is a good start, but this perspective can gloss over the complexities of everyday life. In this next activity, we invite you to take a walk through your neighbourhood and try to see it with new eyes.

1. Plan a route: Take a look back at your map. Plan a walk that highlights some of the notable features (assets & gaps) in your neighbourhood.

2. Walk: Walk through your neighbourhood. Before you go, take a moment to pause and invite God to speak to you as you walk. Ask him what he is up to in your neighbourhood.

To focus your attention, print out this paper and take a picture of ten things along your walk:

1. Something beautiful you never noticed before.
2. A place you might sleep if you had no home to go back to.
3. A place a child might play (take a picture from a child's height).
4. A way to get around if you had no car.
5. A place where decisions are made.
6. A place to feed yourself if your daily budget was \$2.
7. A sign of care (A tended garden, painted bench, repaired fence).
8. A change in the neighbourhood.
9. A place that feels forgotten.
10. A place where people are helping people.

3. Reflect: Find a partner or two and reflect together.

- Which pictures were hardest to take? Easiest?
- Was there anything you never noticed about your neighbourhood?
- What would be the biggest struggle about living in your neighbourhood if you were materially poor?
- How is your neighbourhood changing?
- What is God up to in your neighbourhood?

Listen

Prep: 1-2 Core leaders | 3+ hours | Materials: Laptop, notebook

You now have a much richer idea of the life of your neighbourhood and probably have some ideas for how you might engage. But we are keeping our learner's posture a little longer as we seek to listen to those who are already at work. In this activity, you will reach out to several organizations in your neighbourhood to have conversations about the work they are doing.

1. Reach out: Schedule conversations with 3-5 organizations that have a presence in your neighbourhood (see invitation template below). Refer back to your neighbourhood map for inspiration. The goal of conversing with multiple organizations is to get an idea of the scope and scale of all that is happening in the community.

- You don't need to just talk to people working in nonprofits. You might reach out to business owners, political leaders, pastors, or principals.
- If the neighbourhood you picked is small (a street or block), consider where residents might go if they needed social support.
- **Record:** *We don't want all of you emailing Agincourt Community Services, so we made a form where you can enter your contacts and see where everyone else is contacting:* [Link to Form](#)

2. Talk: Show up and have a conversation. The goal is to gain a deeper understanding of your conversation partner's perspective and work, explore ways you might support them, and begin building a relationship. See below for sample interview questions and tips.

3. Share: Bring your group back together and report on what you've learned. You might write up your notes in an email to the group, or schedule a meeting to share what you've learned. Update your response in the online form to note ways that you might get involved.

Resources for Listening

Sample Email: Make sure you adjust this to your particular context!

Hello,

I'm part of a community group taking a course on being a good neighbor through [OneChurch.to](https://onechurch.to). As part of our learning experience, we're connecting with local organizations making a positive impact in our community.

I live in the area and recently came across [your organization]. I'm really impressed by the work you're doing and would love to learn more about your initiatives. Would you have about half an hour available for a conversation about your work in the community and potentially how our group might get involved or support your efforts?

We're particularly interested in understanding the needs you see in our shared neighborhood and how we might be able to contribute.

Regards,

[Name]

[Your phone number]

Sample Interview Questions

These questions are meant as a place to start, but you can build on them, and let the conversation meander.

- Can you tell me a bit about the history of this organization and the work you do?
- Who do you serve?
- What are the biggest strengths of this community?
- How has this community changed in the last few years?
- How might people living in the area support you?
- What misconceptions do people commonly have about your work or the community you serve?
- What is something for which you are very proud of your organization?
- Is there anyone else that you would recommend I speak to?

Tips:

- Show some love! Buy someone a coffee, or if meeting at their office bring along a box of Timbits.
- Do a bit of background reading to ask smarter questions. For example, you might check an organization's social media and ask about a recent event that they organized.
- Use your group members' contacts to identify potential interviewees.

Launch

Prep: Full group | 1 hour | Materials: Notes from this process

As you reach this final stage, we invite you to pause and consider: *What's next?* Based on what you've learned and your own capacity, how might you extend God's love in your neighbourhood? This next step could be big or small, short-term or long-term, something you do alone or with others. Take this time to prayerfully discern what God might be inviting you into.

1. Reflect: Take time to respond to the questions below. Start with individual reflection (15 mins), then share your responses together (15 mins).

- What are some of the biggest things you learned through this process?
- What moved you most?
- What are the biggest gaps and needs in your neighbourhood?
- What are your gifts? Consider your time, money, skills, relationships, and space.
- Is there a way your gifts might match up with the needs in the neighbourhood?

2. Plan: Determine one tangible action that you can take together. It doesn't have to be big, just rooted in your learning and reflection. You might collect cans for a food pantry, support a local business, volunteer at a neighbourhood organization, or just take a prayerful walk through the neighbourhood. As you plan, consider:

- Will this be a one-time action or part of an ongoing commitment?
- Will you do this as individuals or as a group?
- What do you need to get started—time, resources, partners?
- How will you reflect on what you're learning as you go?

3. Act: Now it is up to you! Conclude by reading Luke 4:17-21 together:

And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:

*"The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to set the oppressed free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."*

Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. He began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

Notes

Further Resources

- Engaging our Community Series: onechurch.to/engaging-our-community/
- Neighbourhood Change Research: <http://neighbourhoodchange.ca/>
- UReach Toronto Resource Library: <https://www.ureachtoronto.ca/resource-library/>
- Participatory Asset Mapping Toolkit, Healthy City:
<https://communityscience.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/AssetMappingToolkit.pdf>