

New Activities and initiatives September 1 2017 to September 30 2018 their start, status and future

1. A fee-free community children's choir program was encouraged by the Communication and Neighbourhood Engagement Initiative (CNEI). **James Bay Children's Choir** started in September and rehearses weekly under the direction of Sandra Fletcher. We have helped Sandra build her social media presence and provided her with rehearsal space. This Spring they performed several concerts (including one at the church) and participated in the Victoria Music Festival winning the Joy of Singing award. The new choir has now started their second season with an increased participation currently 20 young singers. Many parents are in our sanctuary for weekly rehearsals and there are opportunities created for staff and church members to interact and get to know these families.
2. Through an open Sanctuary experiment on Thrift Shop days, we met someone who felt alienated by church. They were "blown away" by our radical hospitality and we partnered together to hold a "[Jerk Church](#)" meeting. The meeting was attended by a few friends (not JBUC members) who were attracted by the prospect of singing non church songs with friends. It was a good heartfelt attempt well outside the box. There are no plans at present for more meetings.
3. In December, we built a large public outdoor **Creche display** with the opportunity for people to take dry goods from under the tree or leave gifts for others to take. "**Take what you need Leave what you can**". As the materials are in place to reconstruct the Creche for this season some congregation members who enjoyed the display last year are expressing a desire to grow the concept making it even more engaging and interactive for the neighbourhood.
4. A **community labyrinth walk in Irving Park** for Epiphany was imagined by Bev Tracy and with community partner New Horizons we invited the neighbourhood to participate in this ancient spiritual practice. This event was attended by more than 50 people -- mostly non church members. It was magical as the the labyrinth was lit with paper bag candle lanterns and drew attention to this wonderful local resource that has not seen much public use since it was installed in 1999. Many participants were attracted by the social media posts and church sign, but also people passing by on the street and through the park we're engaged to participate right at the time of the event. It is on our calendar to repeat at least once again this season.
5. **Window Wanderland**: In September of 2017 we committed to help organize and promote street art through lit window displays in the first ever Canadian [Window Wanderland event](#). Over 100 homes and businesses took part in February 2018 and JBUC was recognized as a major contributor to the success of the event. Six church members and others from the Thrift Shop Ministry participated in preparations. Many from the congregation were participants in the evening Wanderland walk. James Bay United and Thrift Shop have been asked to participate again this year, with JBUC acting as partners and co-promoters of this large scale neighborhood event. This year's event will be February 23, 24 and 25.
6. The CNEI has been making effective use of the new (fall 2017) highly visible **street sign**, not simply advertising JBUC events but also supporting other organizations' neighbourhood activities as well as posting humour and spiritually seasoned messages. Continuing consistent creative and interesting sign posts will keep the neighborhood passers-bys looking, smiling and informed.
7. **Shrove Tuesday Pancake Supper** is an annual church event that the CNEI capitalized on by opening a street level pancake stall in partnership with (Red Barn Market and Discovery Coffee). Several church members participated in serving in the booth and running supplies up from the downstairs kitchen. Neighbours passing by asked questions and were

surprised and thankful to have dinner provided on the street so they didn't have to cook at home that evening. Some took the opportunity to go inside to the church for dinner. Our booth volunteers were able to answer questions about the traditions of Shrove Tuesday in different cultures and why and how it related to the Christian tradition. Long time JBUC members were quite surprised at the number of people we served both on the street and inside in multiple sittings. We will be better prepared to host the larger crowds this year based on our experience in 2018.

8. Community Movie Night (5 Thursdays through Lent) curated and promoted by JBUC but held in the local coffee shop bookstore - James Bay Coffee and Books. We developed a closer relationship with the coffee shop owner and staff and had small audiences (6 to 12) in attendance. Socially important film topics were chosen by a JBUC church member and there was time for conversation. The environment was intimate in a way that people who feel uncomfortable in crowds could cope and engage in a social living-room style setting. People wondered in conversation about why the church was offering these events and church members participating were able to articulate the church's place in the fabric of the community.

9. Social Media: JBUC's online voice is developing and we have increased our Facebook following by 360%. Again, we have not been flying just our own flag, but helping others in the community fly theirs. Because of our social media expertise, we have been asked to support Window Wanderland, Victoria Health Co-Op and the James Bay Roundtable in their social media initiatives and campaigns. Additional work has been done to help create a regional facebook presence for The United Churches of Southern Vancouver Island where all churches can cross promote and support each others programs and events. We will continue to grow our social media presence on Facebook, Instagram and YouTube. One CNEI team member has learned to be a regular Facebook contributor for the church.

10. In May and June, the CNEI encouraged congregation members to participate in **worship leadership** during Rev. Dickey's sabbatical. While not a key objective for the initiative we entered the conversation to encourage 'wondering' about the Sunday morning experience that newcomers might be having. Conversations in this direction are not ongoing. There does not seem to be an broad based appetite for change to the existing Sunday morning worship format.

11. With a team from the congregation, the CNEI planned and presented a **PRIDE worship service** themed around the 30th anniversary of the "Membership, Ministry, and Human Sexuality," statement, also known as the "1988 decision". Several members of the congregation shared their LGBTQIP2SAA experiences and many reported being moved by the liturgy and sacredness of the framing of the stories with scripture and song.

12. Over the summer the congregation was encourage to learn about and walk with (figuratively and literally) homeless and poor people through a connection made with activist and **person of lived experience**, Kym Hiens. We listened to a presentation in evening worship, hosted a community rally and pot luck publically in Irving Park and gave the [Poor Persons Walk](#)(ers) sleeping accomodations in the JBUC sanctuary. One of the activists for the homeless posted on social media: "I am staying at Jesus' house tonight". I have been the primary JBUC spokesperson about the current housing crisis and am helping the congregation engage in the conversation.

13. In July the CNIE played a key planning and execution role in the delivery of **Music Centred Evening Worship Services**. The neighbourhood was invited through newspaper advertising and postcards delivered directly to 7200 homes in James Bay. Each service had a different theme and musical / spiritual focus and was very well attended. The congregation is in the process of discerning the learnings gained from the July evening series and wondering about next steps if any to be pursued. Some new members are worshipping at James Bay as a direct result of coming to the July series.

14. On September 29th, the CNEI gathered together a large group of volunteers to plan and host a **neighbourhood celebration for the community**. Invitations were made to all the neighbourhood groups we have been in contact with over the last year and we celebrated with music and food and artistic expressions of gratitude. A key outcome was that volunteers came from both the Church and the Thrift Shop to host the event. It was successful first time effort with 100 attendees representing a good cross section of the neighbourhood.

Summary: The congregation at James Bay United Church is receptive to new ideas and opportunities to engage with the broader community around them. They are only in the first year of a transition that will take many years to complete. It would be reasonable to expect that some would take a wait and see approach before offering to help or to lead. It would be reasonable to expect that some church members would see change as a threat and choose to worship elsewhere. It would be reasonable to expect that newcomers to the church community will themselves bring more change and disrupt the status quo at James Bay. I am currently involved in conducting telephone interviews / visits with congregation members to deepen relationships, to get a sense of how the individual member views their church community, feels about the new initiatives and where there might be skills and capacity that the Communications and Neighbourhood Engagement Initiative can tap into for the coming year. All successful new initiatives from last year are on the calendar to repeat and we are preparing for several new programs / events / activities this fall and into 2019.

Respectfully submitted,

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