

Chapter 13

Religious Clusters and Interfaith Dialogue

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Introduction

Canada is a multicultural and multi-religious society committed to religious pluralism. Consistent with changing immigration patterns, growing proportions of the population report religious affiliations other than Christian, including Muslim, Hindu, Sikh, and Buddhist.¹ The changing composition of immigrants resulting in increased religious pluralism in Canada is further evidenced by the proliferation of non-Christian places of worship. This is most visible in Greater Toronto and Greater Vancouver, where almost half of all immigrants live. Greater Toronto hosts the “largest conglomeration of ethnic minority places of worship” in Canada (Agrawal, 2009, p. 64). Indeed, as Beyer (2005) notes, “multi-faith religiousness in Canada is overwhelmingly a development that affects the large urban agglomerations [with] 90 percent of those who identify with non-Christian world religions [living] in the six largest metropolitan areas,” of Toronto and Vancouver (pp. 168–69).

The growth of religious plurality and geographic proximity raises important questions about religious tolerance and conflicts (Keaton & Soukup, 2009). In the US, for example, the location of mosques has been a controversial land use issue, especially following the terrorist attacks of 9/11. The planning profession is challenged to accommodate religious places of worship, especially those of new immigrants whose religions differ from the Judeo-Christian faiths (Agrawal, 2009). Neighbourhood resistance to the location of such places of worship, among other factors, has been a major stumbling block. In a bid to solve this problem, planners in Canadian metropolitan areas have resorted to siting religious places in vacant lands originally zoned as industrial or agricultural (Agrawal, 2009). Over time, such planning actions have led to the formation of religious clusters in a few places where multiple institutions of different faith groups reside in close proximity.

Religious land uses take many forms, sizes, and configurations, from start-up temples or mosques in rented or purchased industrial, commercial, or residential units, renovated warehouses, churches, or other buildings to major works of religious architecture, large mixed-use religious campuses, or clusters of places of worship (Hoernig, 2009). Faith-based neighbourhoods, growing around places of worship, are another form of religious development (Agrawal, 2008). This chapter explores the role of planning policies and the physical proximity of places of worship in facilitating interfaith dialogue. The research focused on two religious clusters, perhaps unique in North America: one in the Greater Toronto Area, which emerged due to incremental zoning changes over time; and the other in Greater Vancouver, which came about by a deliberate policy of the local government. Using key informant interviews as the method, and

Allport's contact hypothesis as the guiding theoretical framework, the study explored the effects of proximity and contact (interaction or encounters) on intergroup relations. We first review Allport's contact hypothesis as it relates to difference before returning to a discussion of the findings from the study.

Interfaith Dialogue and Allport's Contact Hypothesis

The clustering of religious institutions has led to the geographic proximity of different religious institutions in space. While this proximity may enhance religious encounter and dialogue, it is by no means a guarantee. Interfaith dialogue is defined as a discourse between individuals or groups who hold differing religious beliefs and convictions for the purposes of understanding their faiths (Mojezs, 1989). It is a "conscious process, through which deliberate efforts toward understanding the religious stranger is implied," which differs from a simple encounter in that the latter is not rooted in a *deliberate* interaction (Urbano, 2012, p. 150). Interfaith dialogue emphasizes cooperation and the exchange of theological beliefs. It is an organized formal dialogue to "promote respect for difference, encourage cooperation, and overcome conflict" (Seljak, 2009, p. 22) by exploring values and challenges common among participants as well as exposing prejudices (Smock, 2003). Interfaith dialogue has been proposed as a way to counter hostile attitudes held towards religious "others"; it is a "conscious effort to step out of our comfort zone and to find inspiration from those who come from a world different than our own" (Mews, 2006, p. 80).

In this chapter, interfaith dialogue is defined as an *intentional* encounter between individuals who adhere to differing religious beliefs and practices in an effort to foster respect and cooperation among these groups through organized dialogue. Allport's contact hypothesis is employed as the guiding framework of discussion. Contact hypothesis pays particular attention to diversity, communication, and interaction – the principles on which interfaith dialogue is based. The hypothesis emerged after the Second World War in an effort to alter negative stereotypes of racial groups, shaped by the belief that ignorance gives rise to prejudice and that if individuals across diverse “group lines” became better acquainted with each other, they would discover their common humanity (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006).

Gordon Allport (1954), in his seminal work exploring the nature of prejudice, introduced contact hypothesis as a mode of analysis to investigate the role of contact in reducing prejudice and minimizing conflict. According to his hypothesis, four key conditions are necessary for a positive attitude shift by intergroup members to reduce prejudice and increase cohesion. These are equal status, common goals, intergroup cooperation, and the support of authorities, laws, and customs.

While contact hypothesis was developed largely to explore and explain segregation and anti-black prejudice, its scope has widened over the years. Today, it “remains the main theoretical framework for mixing and desegregation” (Wood & Landry, 2008, p. 107). Within its larger application, this hypothesis has most commonly been used to explore the relations between diverse racial, ethnic, and cultural groups (Laurence, 2011). Nonetheless, only a few studies of interfaith encounters have applied the contact framework of analysis (Hemming, 2011; Ipgrave, 2002; Connolly, 2009).

Migration affects the religious landscape in receiving countries, changes the cultural landscape, and results in encounters between host communities and diasporic religious communities (Kong, 2010; Peach, 2002). Yet, there is a dearth of planning literature on religious relations in plural societies. Yiftachel's (1992) study is one of the few comprehensive works that utilizes ethnic and religious relations as a framework for analysis in planning. Winkler's (2006) work in Johannesburg, South Africa, shows that the secular values of planning theory and practice are often indifferent to – or at times in conflict with – the religious beliefs of the majority of citizens on behalf of whom planners make decisions.

A recent study by Dwyer, Gilbert, and Shah (2012) draws attention to the way the sacred has been constructed as an incongruous use in the suburbs. The authors point out that the construction of religious buildings in suburban landscapes is “out of place,” a discourse situated within the historical theorization and articulation of the suburbs as a site of modernization, materialism, and secularization. Dwyer et al. (2012) use this incongruity as a starting point to address the complexities of relationships between religion and suburban space. Gale and Naylor (2002) also address the inaptness of minority places of worship in urban landscapes, exploring the intersection of planning, policy, and individuals of difference.

A few works (such as Agrawal, 2008; Kong, 2010; Ley, 2008; and Nye, 1993, as cited in Kong, 2001) attest to the significance of religious minority places of worship in (sub)urban settings as markers of permanence and belonging, as well as an assertion of immigrants' claim to space. Other studies on the nexus of religion, immigration, and “discriminatory” planning policies are limited to the sites on which places of worship are

built and the land use and design problems associated with their construction. The challenges posed by multiple religions and faiths to contemporary urban planning first received attention in Great Britain (Thomas & Krishnarayan, 1994). In his subsequent publications (Hutchings & Thomas, 2005; Thomas, 2008), Thomas draws attention to the importance of faith groups in the planning process.

In Canada, studies have mostly focused on difficulties encountered by places of worship in the planning approval process (Agrawal, 2009; Beattie & Ley, 2001; Germain & Gagnon, 2003; Isin & Siemiatycki, 1999). Gagnon, Dansereau, and Germain's (2004) work on Hasidic Jews in metropolitan Montreal draws on case studies to illuminate the complex relations between people of difference who occupy the same social space, and the role of urban planners in mitigating such land use conflicts.

Dwyer, Tse, and Ley's (2013) research uses No. 5 Road in Richmond, British Columbia, one of the two clusters in this chapter, as a case study to explore the role of religious institutions in immigrant integration. The study concludes that these religious institutions contribute to the integration of immigrants in multiple ways. They facilitate transnational activities such as international migration and the transfer of funds between countries and intra-communal services. They also provide local networking opportunities for recent immigrants. The authors suggest that No. 5 Road provided an educational resource for city residents about diverse religions and cultures. They also point to City Museum's efforts to host exhibitions as a good example of telling the story of No. 5 Road and "to just not preserve a historical record but also ground discussions about religion, ethnicity, and integration in concrete events" (p. 49).

The two studies closest to the topic at hand are those of Hoernig (2009) and Agrawal (2008). Hoernig's study explored various forms of religious development in Canada and their implications for urban planning. Agrawal (2008) in his study explored whether religion influences neighbourhood location decisions and whether it contributes to the social capital within so-called faith-based neighbourhoods in the Greater Toronto Area. His study suggests that faith is not an all-encompassing characteristic of these neighbourhoods and has a weak influence in promoting neighbourliness. Another related study, Hackworth and Stein (2012), documented the rapid expansion of places of worship in Toronto's industrial lands and the mounting tension between faith and economic development.

Religious Clusters and Interfaith Dialogue

This chapter focuses on two religious clusters as case studies. These clusters originated under different planning regimes: one in a suburban municipality in the Greater Toronto Area and the other in a suburban municipality in Greater Vancouver. These constellations of religious institutions are likely the only ones of their kind in North America and thus present an opportunity to test their usefulness in promoting interfaith understanding.

The religious cluster in the Toronto area is located on a quiet street – Professional Court – off a major arterial road in the city of Mississauga, Ontario (see figure 13.1). The area is zoned light industrial, and six places of worship are located there. The places of worship came about through a zoning designation change from industrial to institutional

on a case-by-case basis over a period of 20 years. The six ethnic places of worship include a Korean church, an Orthodox Indian church, a Jamaican Pentecostal church, two Indian temples, and a mosque. All of these places of worship except the Korean church participated in the study.

FIGURE 13.1: THE RELIGIOUS CLUSTER ALONG PROFESSIONAL COURT, CITY OF MISSISSAUGA. ABOUT HERE.

Figure 13.1: The religious cluster along professional court, City of Mississauga. The buildings within the black outline show the religious uses on the site. Map data: Google.

FIGURE 13.2: RELIGIOUS CLUSTER ALONG No. 5 ROAD IN THE GREATER VANCOUVER AREA. ABOUT HERE.

Figure 13.2: The religious cluster along No. 5 Road in the Greater Vancouver area. Note the different cultural uses, including the India Cultural Centre of Canada, the BC Muslim Association, the Thrangu Monastery Association, and the Neighbourhood Christian School. Courtesy City of Richmond, British Columbia, Canada.

A cluster of about 24 religious assemblies is located in the city of Richmond, British Columbia, along one side of No. 5 Road, a three-kilometre stretch between Blundell Road and Steveston Highway (see figure 13.2). This linear cluster is colloquially referred to as “Highway to Heaven.” In 1990, in the absence of any available developable land within the city limits and given the increasing demand for new places of worship, the city of Richmond, in consultation with the province’s Agricultural Land Commission, established a back lands policy which rezoned lands along the eastern side of No. 5 Road from agricultural to assembly use, including places of worship, schools, and other public use facilities. However, the assembly use of the land was limited to a depth of about 360 feet from No. 5 Road and the remaining back portion of the property was to be dedicated to active farming. A variety of faith groups are now represented

there: Christian, Jewish, Buddhist, Muslim, Sikh, and Hindu. The site includes two mosques, eight Christian churches (six of which are Chinese congregations), three Buddhist temples, two Hindu temples, a Sikh gurdwara, and six religious schools.

This study employed a qualitative methodological approach to gather data through semi-structured interviews with key informants. The interviews elicited insight into the informants' experiences of worshipping in close physical proximity with diverse faith groups as well as their involvement in and perception of interfaith activities.

In the Toronto area, eight key informants were interviewed. Three of them were interfaith advocates and practitioners who helped to document their experience in interfaith work, explore whether geographical proximity was a factor in interfaith dialogue, and identify the positive benefits or tangible outcomes of participating in interfaith dialogue. The five other participants comprised members of boards of directors and representatives of the religious institutions on Professional Court. These five provided insight into the effects on interfaith dialogue of physical proximity among diverse places of worship in the cluster.

In the case of Greater Vancouver, nine individuals were interviewed. Seven of them were leaders or representatives of religious institutions and schools on No. 5 Road; the other two were Richmond officials who were knowledgeable about the area. The members of the religious institutions helped document their experience of being in geographic proximity to other places of worship and identify benefits, if any, in promoting interfaith dialogue. The city officials provided the background and the policy context for the emergence of the cluster.

Three major findings emerged from the study: 1) community services such as parking and municipal projects provide an opportunity for informal encounters between members of different religious groups; 2) diverse religious groups cooperated on matters of common interest such as disaster relief; and 3) government programs are not a preferred way to promote interfaith dialogue. We discuss each of these findings in turn.

Points of Interaction

The literature suggests that spaces that are shared by individuals of difference could offer an environment in which encounters can occur. These are encounters between individuals who may not otherwise interact. By being in close geographical proximity, the places of worship within the cluster create a unique opportunity for people to engage with the religious “other.” Community service, parking, and municipal projects provided the points of interaction for the faith groups.

i) Community Service

The existence of common social goals between two or more religious groups provides an opportunity for intergroup contact. Common goals can foster mutual understanding and cooperation between diverse groups who may otherwise not interact or work together on projects. In turn, this contact and joint effort could produce an environment in which prejudice is reduced and relationships are established.

Non-denominational community service surfaced as an important point of collaboration among the faith groups studied. All five religious establishments on

Mississauga's Professional Court were involved in community service work and so were the institutions on No. 5 Road in Richmond. This took one of two forms: international relief work or local community outreach activities. Adherents engaged in international work such as organizing to send relief aid for natural disasters; for instance, when the tsunami struck Japan or when large parts of India were affected by floods. Local community involvement often took the form of distribution of food through a food bank operated by the place of worship, helping the homeless or others in need beyond their own congregation and faith, or contributing to charity events for a sick kids' hospital or a cancer foundation.

All five of the religious leaders on Professional Court commented on the possibility of collaboration for social service work. Ujwal,ⁱⁱ a member of the board of directors of one of the religious institutions, recognized the existence of common goals: "Often enough there are similarities between our operations and our missions." Pradyumn, a representative of a different religious organization, explained the collaboration between his temple and the neighbouring Orthodox Church:

And then we also worked together during the tsunami ... We [collected] some food, donated to the appropriate association, and recently we also raised [money] during December for homeless people. [We supported] the soup kitchen [by organizing] a drive to donate all the canned food. We [did] that together.

This informal collaboration, albeit at a low level, is also evident at the mosque, according to Mohammad, who represents the local mosque: "Even with the church next door, they have a food bank also, so in the event they should be short of anything ... we

can help them out with that and vice versa.” Mohammad noted that these charity drives are two “individual things,” that is to say that there is no *official* collaboration between the faith groups. However, it is the physical proximity of the church that made this exchange possible. Collaboration between the faith groups located within the cluster is an example of “bridging social capital” (Laurence, 2011), which could lead to improved attitudes between the groups.

The sentiments expressed by Richmond’s No. 5 Road respondents were no different, but most of their community work seemed directed towards their own congregations with very little or no collaboration with others. One institution did, however, highlight making donations for a cancer foundation and bringing guest speakers to learn about other religions as a way to serve the larger common good.

When asked whether working for the larger social good could be used as a point of collaboration, a pastor of a religious institution on No. 5 Road responded: “It is possible to come together for a higher social good – goodwill towards human kind. You can rally people around that idea. For instance, the issue of abortion can bring Muslims and Christians together ... If something threatens our existence, a non-religious matter, then that can bring us together. For instance, if there is a threat to the practice or expression of religion, it will bring us together.” Another pastor from the same institution, however, contradicted this: “We cannot take out religion, even for the social good. Social good comes out of our theological values.”

From these statements, we can conclude that the emergence of a common vision can lead to collaboration between diverse faith groups in a manner that is not necessarily related to their faith but is rooted in meeting a social need. Also, religious groups that

differ in their beliefs are willing to discuss matters that may threaten their common existence, such as restrictions of their religious freedom. This buttresses the point made by Harris and Young (2009) that in order to bridge the gap between people of diverse backgrounds, it is necessary to focus on shared visions and tasks.

ii) Parking

Parking was an issue that was mentioned by almost all religious leaders in both clusters and was identified as a common problem experienced by many places of worship. Consider Mohammad's statement with respect to Professional Court:

We have a very, very good relationship in terms of not necessarily meeting frequently or having frequent dialogues as such, but because one of the issues we have in many places of worship is parking ... Because our events happen to not coincide at the same time, we have an understanding with the other community groups to utilize their parking facility in the event we have an overflow ... At the very beginning, all stuck together and said this is okay.

Mohammad's statement makes it clear that parking offers an opportunity for interaction. While mundane in nature, concerns over parking created a space for the diverse faith leaders to connect and dialogue as neighbours. Thompson, a representative of a place of worship on Professional Court, noted that parking quickly became an issue which the religious leaders realized they could work together to address:

Well, it's a mutual thing, because I approached [the mosque] first ... I introduced myself [and] where I am coming from. And we decided to

work together. He said, “No problem, you can use my parking.” This is how we got to know each other.

At No. 5 Road, Shalom, the principal of a religious school, responded similarly: “Our relationship with our neighbour goes as far as sharing parking. It just started last year when I walked into the temple and introduced myself.” Similar examples were cited on key religious festivals when neighbouring institutions offered their parking lots for worshippers of different faiths. Using each other’s parking lots was evidence, as one interviewee told us, of the level of trust between the different religious communities.

iii) Infrastructure Service

Another major instance of collaboration on No. 5 Road was the installation of a main sewage pipe initiated by the city in the early 2000s, which required the neighbouring religious communities to contribute funds towards its provision. One respondent mentioned how his establishment allowed his immediate neighbour to temporarily flow the sewage through their property until the sewer lines were put in place. However, not everyone agreed with their neighbours, and the cooperation lasted only a short time. Disagreements arose over whether financial contributions by each institution for the sewer line should be based on the frontage of the lot, which is the usual practice, or the size of the facility.

Other expressions of collaboration existed in the form of sharing private infrastructure such as a gymnasium facility. An early city initiative for the construction of a highway interchange brought institutions of different religions together but was also short-lived (Dwyer et al., 2013). An early initiative on the interchange linked a number of

institutions together under the leadership of the British Columbia Muslim Association, which was severely affected by the project, but they could not convince other immediate neighbours to join them.

Disaster Management

Responses to local disaster management planning also prompted institutions to collaborate and cooperate. One of the religious schools on No. 5 Road pointed to a nearby religious institution as part of its disaster management plan. In the event a natural disaster strikes, the students will leave the school and take refuge there. The cooperating religious institution was quick to emphasize this arrangement as a sign of cooperation among neighbours. A puzzling part, however, was that the school representative referred to this institution by an incorrect name and an incorrect religious affiliation. Perhaps it was an honest mistake or perhaps it is indicative of how little these neighbours know each other.

Development and Expansion Plans

An ongoing issue concerning the role of the religious institutions along Richmond's No. 5 Road is safeguarding the agricultural land reserve and restricting the expansion of existing development. The back lands policy required the institutions to actively farm the land to the back of their properties. In some cases this has been a source of conflict between the religious institutions and the city. Many institutions are

successfully growing fruits and are engaged in active farming. However, not all of the institutions have fulfilled the expectation of using their land for agricultural purposes.

For instance, one of the institutions submitted an application to expand its facility deeper into its agriculturally zoned land and erect a statue. This would have defied the height constraints in the area, especially because it is so close to the Vancouver airport. Although the application was subsequently withdrawn, it gives us an interesting peek into neighbourhood politics and the reasons why sometimes neighbours come together. The opposition to the application came mainly from the residential neighbourhoods on the opposite side of No. 5 Road and not from the religious institutions, which would have been equally affected by the development. The members of a nearby religious institution admitted to supporting the application despite its excessive size and height because they thought that, if the application was approved, it would help them get their own expansion plans cleared by the city.

The above discussion provides examples of shared “functional” space and infrastructure that are used by religious institutions in the neighbourhood. The necessity for increased parking, sharing the cost of infrastructure, and preparation for a natural disaster led to informal collaboration between the groups. These encounters were not premised on religious exchange. Nonetheless, the examples illustrate the way in which the sharing of space and infrastructure – public or private – brings about interactions and encounters between members of diverse ethnoreligious groups. The cases of sewage lines, road improvements, and development applications demonstrate that such interfaith collaborations were often one-off projects and that their failures and successes were

usually not the product of theological conflicts. Shared parking in both clusters is thus far the only example of sustained engagement by the religious institutions.

Seeing the “Other” as Human

The contact hypothesis articulates the power of contact and interaction to alter existing prejudices, particularly towards out-groups. This study also showed that encounters and interactions among the different faith groups have a “humanizing” effect. Mohammad touched on how the physical proximity of places of worship allows him to see his diverse faith neighbours as humans and not just as religious individuals.

Having us on the same block, so to speak, allows me to see how our neighbours interact outside of their place of worship, and so even without us even saying anything, it’s something you can see, right? And to me, this is something probably a bit more beneficial than arranging a meeting to be talking all the time.

Pradyumn also noted a common humanity to which all belong:

As you know or learn about another religion your thinking about that religion changes, and the same thing happened to me as well. My thinking, rather my respect for Islam and Christianity, has really gone up. Basically, what I learned is that though they are Muslims, Christians, or Hindus, the first thing is that we are all human beings. And as human beings, we all three different organizations are helping another human being ... I didn’t have that kind of understanding before.

It is important to note that the above comments were made by respondents at Mississauga's Professional Court. Respondents at No. 5 Road made it clear that they respected their neighbours as human beings and as people of other faiths, but that the views they held had nothing to do with the proximity to the other religious groups.

Religion as a Point of Dissonance

One finding that emerged from this study is the pessimism held by leaders of the places of worship regarding interfaith dialogue. Participants echoed concerns that religion can be a possible point of contention and contestation, which may lead to hostile relations between the groups. There appeared to be consensus that religion is a “hot” topic that can divide people more than unite them. Participants spoke about religious intolerance and conflict on a national and global level and drew attention to the difficulties that might arise if a meeting between faith groups was premised on understanding each other's religion. Consider, for example, Pradyumn's explanation of the relationships between his temple and the neighbouring places of worship on Professional Court:

You know, I really feel proud when I see this kind of thing
[collaboration between the neighbouring faith groups over parking]
happening here, that two different religions or three different religions are
working so closely with each other. I mean ... there is lots of tension
going on across the world ... mainly because of religion.

Paul, an interfaith advocate, echoed similar sentiments, showing apprehension about the discussion of the various religious tenets: “But when it comes to religion ...

most of the bad things happening in our world is because of religious belief ... so we don't want to get involved in that.”

On Richmond's No. 5 Road, Pastor Mike said, “The problem with people not coming together is religion ... It is religion that is keeping people in the silos.” John, another pastor, agreed by saying, “Interfaith activity diminishes the identity of a religion.” Along the same lines, Lama, a Buddhist master, opined, “We do not need interfaith dialogue. Religion is not like shopping to choose what you like. It's better not to compare, but to respect each other.”

While some religious leaders in both clusters were open to further interaction with their faith neighbours, they were not certain that this encounter should occur under the auspices of a formal interfaith dialogue. As one religious leader put it, “Religiously, you're not going to see eye to eye ... but socially ... it is okay, something that involves the community.”

These responses illustrate a lack of receptivity on the part of religious leaders to engage with individuals of difference on matters of faith. This would most closely align with the exclusivist model of interfaith dialogue, which is characterized by claims of the religious uniqueness of one's own revelation and “oneness and onliness” as the language of identity (Eck, 2003; McCarthy, 1998). According to this model of interfaith dialogue, individuals maintain a conviction in their own path, while rejecting and claiming the inadequacy of all other paths. This approach is the least conducive to dialogue, as the exclusivist member will engage in order to convert rather than to understand (Abu-Nimer, Khoury, & Welty, 2007).

In this context, it would seem unlikely that the participants would be receptive to dialogue on religious matters. Thus, the religious leaders in this study demonstrated an interest in furthering their knowledge about religious out-groups but tended to engage in dialogue for non-religious purposes.

The Role of Government

The position that religious leaders maintain on government involvement in interfaith work is of interest, especially in the context of interfaith dialogue as a formal, organized initiative. When asked about government's involvement in interfaith dialogue initiatives, many on Professional Court thought the role of government should be minimal. One respondent said, "Politics and religion don't mix." Another stated, "It [government's involvement] becomes too formal, too political, too much red tape." Two other religious leaders favoured a limited role for government, which would largely involve providing funding and support for interfaith initiatives.

An official from Richmond, who was responsible for coordinating the efforts of the city council and faith groups, argued that government funding and government initiative led to interfaith dialogue on shared issues such as perception, religious intolerance, discrimination, and racism. Funding through a government program, Embrace BC (a provincial fund for anti-racism initiatives including interfaith bridging), helped create an Interfaith Committee in Richmond, BC, in 2009, which initiated a number of programs for No. 5 Road. However, when the provincial funding dried up, the committee became defunct and with it died the interfaith initiatives.

To illustrate his point, the city official cited development of Temple Tours of the institutions on No. 5 Road as evidence of the work of the Interfaith Committee. He also mentioned the city-organized Doors Open Richmond program, the exhibition about the religious heritage on No. 5 Road at the City Museum, and the plans to promote No. 5 Road as a tourist destination. He believed there was a willingness among No. 5 Road institutions to participate in the interfaith dialogue and activities, but it required sustainable government funding along with the involvement of a secular coordinating agency to organize and promote interfaith dialogue.

Interestingly, in response to the question of government involvement, while a few religious leaders on No. 5 Road remembered the works of the Interfaith Committee, others did not acknowledge it or mentioned it in passing in discussions on interfaith dialogue. Many rejected outright the idea of having a committee to promote interfaith dialogue.

Participants' assertions that external involvement should be minimal are countered by Seljak (2003), who argues that Canada is not keeping pace with other Western nations that receive high levels of religious minorities and that policy makers should take heed of this issue. He suggested that one function of an interfaith council is to "promote understanding and cooperation among various religious groups" (p. 28). Seljak's work is of interest in this conversation because he recognizes the importance of interfaith initiatives in cultivating relations between individuals and promoting religious identity; but this study suggests that this kind of encounter is already occurring, although informally. There seems to be some support, albeit limited, among the religious leaders of the two clusters for an institutionalized interfaith organization.

Lessons from Religious Cluster and Interfaith Dialogue

The study shows that the effect of geographic proximity through clustering on interfaith dialogue is weak. Proximity does not appear to be a significant factor in the establishment of “organized” interfaith initiatives. Planning actions can therefore only go so far in promoting interfaith dialogue. Proximity does, however, play a role in increasing contact between faith groups, and it appears that these encounters are influential in improving interfaith relations, as evidenced by increased interaction and cordial relations, and in altering attitudes about the religious “other.” Proximity is also a factor in promoting interfaith encounters and interactions. These encounters are influential in altering attitudes and perspectives about an out-group.

Proximity then has the potential to facilitate the process of breaking down barriers and building bridges between diverse communities, including faith communities. Proximity can also minimize the segregation and avoidance between groups living in diverse communities, a concept put forth by Cantle (2005). Despite the increasing diversity in multicultural, cosmopolitan urban centres, there is “evidence of considerable levels of separation to the extent that the relationship between communities might also be characterized as one of ‘parallel lives’” (Cantle, 2005, p. 14).

The faith groups ran a number of similar yet distinct social and community programs and worked together infrequently and at a low level. Municipal projects and plans did corral the neighbours together but only for the short duration of the projects. Parking seemed to be a major area of sustained collaboration between the places of

worship within the clusters, suggesting that the sharing of functional space can provide a point of encounter between the faith groups. This type of encounter can be situated within the discourse on proximity in the context of a modern (sub)urban neighbourhood. As Qadeer and Kumar (2006) note, “the contemporary neighbourhood is a community of polite but limited social relations. People normally have a largely nodding acquaintance with other residents of their street” (p. 15).

The social capital in a faith-based institutional cluster seems no different from that of any suburban residential neighbourhood. While participants mentioned that their close physical proximity with the diverse religious organizations enabled them to see their neighbours as humans rather than just the “religious other,” it did not seem to foster greater bonds between religious leaders or adherents. None of the participants mentioned developing friendships with members of another faith community, and simultaneously they expressed little interest in or need or desire for interfaith dialogue.

Finally, the study indicates that the religious leaders did not fully support interfaith dialogue or any institutionalized interfaith initiatives. Participants in this study envisioned an encounter rooted in community service and premised upon a clearly defined social goal, rather than one related to religion or theology. This finding is significant because studies show that out-groups working together towards a common goal are linked by mutual rapprochement, which contributes to a decrease in prejudiced attitudes or hostile relations (Amir, Ben-Ari, & Bizman, 1985, p. 213). The presence of common goals and values unrelated to a theology is significant in that it is a domain of community cohesion (Cantle, 2005).

From a planning perspective, it is important to note that neither of the two clusters emerged with the intention of promoting interfaith dialogue. The planning policy that created No. 5 Road was primarily intended to solve the problem of exponentially increasing demand for new places of worship and the threat of development pressure on precious agricultural land. In other words, No. 5 Road was not unplanned but was intentionally created, albeit accidentally, by a distinctive planning policy. However, the consequence is a landscape of religious diversity, where buildings from different faith communities stand somewhat incongruously side by side. Unlike No. 5 Road, the clustering along Professional Court did not happen by a deliberate policy, but occurred through site-by-site zoning changes over time.

All in all, development projects such as road and sewer line improvements and disaster management plans brought the neighbours together to work towards a common cause. The contacts and interactions developed through these projects could be channelled into a much more concrete and sustainable engagement to stimulate interfaith dialogue. Planning actions can thus provide harmonious multifaith neighbourhoods if they are combined with interfaith initiatives coordinated by a government-funded program run by a secular civil society organization.

This study demonstrates that while the original intention was not the creation of multifaith communities, much less a vehicle for interfaith dialogue, both places have potential for building an environment for such dialogue. However, to maximize its utility, sustained funding for coordinating the interfaith activities is needed. Planners can encourage participation of faith groups in public hearings and discussions on matters that are common or concerning to all groups. Working together on such projects may increase

appreciation for persons in different faith groups without interfering with their individual religious identities. Clustering places of worship as a deliberate planning activity could promote interfaith encounters that could decrease prejudice and increase appreciation for persons of other religious faiths, even if it does not result in interfaith dialogue.

Notes

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ⁱ In 2011, according to the National Household Survey, the largest faith in Canada was Christianity. About two-thirds of Canada’s population (67.3 per cent) reported that they were affiliated with a Christian religion. Roman Catholics were the largest Christian religious group in 2011. About 38.7 per cent of the population identified themselves as Roman Catholic, down from 43 per cent a decade ago. 7.2 per cent of Canada’s population reported affiliations with Muslim, Hindu, Sikh, or Buddhist religions, up from 4.9 per cent a decade ago. People who identified themselves as Muslim made up 3.2 per cent of the population (2 per cent in 2001), Hindu 1.5 per cent (1 per cent in 2001), Sikh 1.4 per cent (0.9 per cent in 2001), Buddhist

1.1 per cent (1 per cent in 2001), and Jewish 1.0 per cent (1.1 per cent in 2001). Each of them saw an increase except for Jewish.

ⁱⁱ Pseudonyms are used to protect the privacy of individuals interviewed.