2023–2024

West Island Exegesis:

Who is my neighbour?

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Réseau de l'Ouest de l'Île
West Island Network

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1.0

Introduction

Director's Introduction

to the West Island Exegesis

> *"But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, 'And who is my neighbour?'"*
> *– Luke 10:29*

Who is my neighbour?

I'm a firm believer in asking good questions. Jesus asked many more questions than he answered. One popular book states that Jesus asked 307 questions in the Gospels and that out of 183 questions people asked Jesus, he only answered three. The vast majority of Jesus' responses to questions…were more questions!

One of the most critical questions Jesus answered was "What is the Greatest Commandment of the Jewish law?" Jesus answered that it was "to love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength and to love your neighbour as yourself". But at least on one occasion, his answer was followed by another question asked by an expert of the law, "and who is my neighbour?" Jesus responded to this question with the parable of the Good Samaritan, an unidentified man who was found beaten and robbed on the side of the road. Three men passed by (a Levite, a Priest, and a Samaritan) and only the Samaritan stopped to help. At the end of the story, Jesus asks, "Who was a neighbour to the man on the side of the road?" To this question, the expert of the law could only answer, "The one who had mercy on him."

This encounter demonstrates that we cannot love and care for our neighbours if we don't discover who they are. And this often requires confronting our own prejudices and ethnocentrism. Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel wrote, "Any god who is mine but not yours, and god concerned with me but not with you, is an idol." The greatest obstacle to Gospel witness is not only that we have made God in our image, but that we try to make our neighbour in our own image too. At the heart of a community exegesis is this probing question of Jesus, "*and who is your neighbour*?"

In what ways can we?

When approaching tough problems, I've learned to ask, "In what ways can we?" rather than simply, "How can we?" It is a subtle difference that opens up the possibility of multiple solutions to a problem. It is easy to imagine that Jesus only asked questions for which he already knew the answer. But I'd like to think that often Jesus was being curious, wondering how his listeners would answer his and their own questions. Jesus is curiously asking, *In what ways will we choose to love our God and neighbours*? This drives us to deeper self-understanding and greater awareness of others, and it sets the stage for creativity in our loving and caring for our neighbours.

The challenges of Jesus' days are not so unfamiliar to us today—political and religious extremism, economic disparities, gender and race-based inequality, sex trafficking and forced labour. We might add today, ecological crises, food and housing insecurity, and the rapid rise of mental illness. As you read this exegesis, I want to invite you to ask these two questions—*Who is my neighbour (who do I consider my neighbour)*? And, In what ways can we love and care for them? That is the purpose of this exegesis, to help Christians pay attention to their own communities and consider how they can respond to the Spirit's invitation to love in the care and compassion of Christ.

Tim Keener
Executive Director
Christian Direction

1.2 Background

In 1983, Glenn Smith, the former executive director of Christian Direction Inc. Montréal, in pondering the significance of the prophet Jeremiah's words to the Jewish exiles in Babylon, was moved by the call to seek the peace of that city (Jeremiah 29:1-7). These words became a cornerstone for Christian Direction's development and practice of a contextual theology of community development. One expression of this approach to Urban Ministry is what Glenn called the *neighbourhood exegesis* - the study of one's community as one would study a biblical text. The goal of the neighbourhood exegesis is to understand "who is my neighbour" so that Christians might better know how to love and engage in their communities. In 2002, Glenn developed a 20-step outline for churches to write a *neighbourhood exegesis* and help them seek the good of their communities.

In 2006, in conjunction with Catholic and Protestant churches, Christian Direction produced the first *neighbourhood exegesis* of Hochelaga-Maisonneuve which kickstarted numerous community initiatives in a significantly impoverished borough in the east of Montreal. The Hochelaga exegesis also paved the way for a series of similar projects throughout Montreal and Quebec including the first West Island exegesis in 2012. The West Island report helped to rally churches and launched the West Island Network, a network of churches collaborating for the good of their city. Since that time, the West Island Network, or WIN, has been working to increase collaboration between churches and mobilizing their congregations to love their neighbours and transform their city.

Much has changed in the past 12 years since the last West Island Exegesis was published. Rising costs of living, demographic changes, and a global pandemic are just a few of the significant challenges facing the West Island community in the last several years, to say nothing of the rest of Canada. The purpose behind the current edition of the West Island Exegesis has been to update churches and their partners in this region about the current needs in their community and how they can respond more effectively to these needs. The following report provides an up-to-date portrait of the West Island to contextualize this community and equip churches for the missional work of community transformation in their city.

1.3 Methodology

The methodology of this report relies on a combination of qualitative and quantitative data while drawing on the significant interpretive and empirical resources of Christian theological tradition for the practice of community development. The first section of this report relies primarily on the 2021 Census information provided by Statistics Canada which supplies demographic data for each of the municipalities of the West Island. Importantly, data supplied by the Canadian Census is subject to a margin of error and contains minor statistical anomalies reflected in the imperfect 100% total of each data set presented in this report. Market research from Canadian Mortgage and Housing was also used to acquire information on housing and rental costs.

The qualitative data was acquired through a combination of four Focus Groups, five interviews, and two surveys of Clergy, Community Stakeholders, and Residents from throughout the West Island. Finally, the following report has been significantly shaped by Christian theological reflection as it is intended to apply the tools of Christian spirituality to the work of community transformation. This provides churches with familiar concepts with which they can understand and engage with the different needs and calls to action outlined in this report. Simultaneously, this theological reflection can offer community partners a glimpse into the ideas and languages which guide Christian community engagement that may be foreign to them to facilitate closer connections and bridge the divide between community organizations and the Church. This study is therefore intended to combine rigorous research with Christian theology to equip the Church for her work and facilitate greater understanding and engagement between the Church and the wider community.

"Close but not too close"

A History of the West Island

2.0

A Brief History of Montreal

Montreal was originally named Ville Marie by its founder Paul Chomedey de Maisonneuve in 1642. The city is located on unceded Indigenous lands which had long served as a place for trading, meeting and gathering among Indigenous peoples including the Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabe nations. Their histories are intertwined with those of the French and English settlers of this region. The newfound city's key position as a mandatory transfer point of goods on the St. Lawrence River made it an important trading hub in the French Colony and the gateway to the fur trade in the interior of the North American continent.

The British conquest in 1759, and later the American Revolution, led to an influx of immigrants from the British Isles and American loyalists which caused the population of Montreal to shift to an English majority by the 1850s. However, the departure of Anglophones from the urban core and the internal migration of Francophones to the city tipped the scales back in favour of a French majority in the second half of the 19th century. These demographic factors created a diverse and sometimes divisive state of affairs in Montreal.

Already a thriving and cosmopolitan city under the French regime, Montreal became the economic and industrial centre of Canada, quickly earning the status of the largest city in British North America by 1860. The city continued to be an important financial and commercial centre into the 1900s, with new shipping lanes and railway networks ensuring its status as an economic hub. The turn of the century also saw more ethnically diverse immigrants arriving in Montreal, such as Jews and Orthodox Christians from Eastern Europe, as well as Americans during the prohibition era. After the Second World War, the population of Montreal exceeded one million for the first time due to a significant increase in immigration. Major projects like Expo '67, new expressways, skyscrapers, and the Montreal metro system all contributed to the city's increasing economic growth. During the 1960s, Montreal also witnessed the Quiet Revolution, an awakening of Québécois nationalism which sparked the beginning of a new separatist movement throughout the province of Quebec. Within the next few decades, the fear of separation led many citizens and businesses to leave Montreal and head to other Canadian cities. Following this

exodus, Montreal's economy suffered a period of economic decline. Despite this, the city was able to adapt to a de-industrialized economy in the latter half of the 20th century, diversifying into industries such as telecommunications, pulp and paper, aerospace, software and pharmaceuticals. Additionally, improvements to Montreal's port and the construction of new highways also preserved its importance as a shipping and transportation hub for Eastern North America.

In January 2002, Montreal merged with 27 municipalities surrounding the city, representing the entire Island of Montreal. This merger contributed to a great deal of tension, as the mainly English suburbs felt pressured into the merger by the Quebec provincial government. As a result, in June of 2004, referendums took place in various former municipalities to decide the fate of the merger. Some cities, especially those with large Anglophone populations, "demerged" while others decided to remain as part of Montreal.

2.2 The Development of the West Island

The history of the "West Island" as it is now called has often been defined by its proximity to but also its separation from the city of Montreal. The first inhabitants of the Island of Montreal were the northern Haudenosaunee, who had apparently disappeared from the area by the time of permanent French settlement in 1642. Long before it was called the West Island, Montreal's western periphery played an important role in the city's early development and came to occupy a unique place in the history of the region. In the 17th century, land seigneuries were distributed by the Sulpician landowners throughout the western island, mainly to soldiers. Alongside these seigneuries were windmills, trading posts, and forts to help settle the area and protect Montreal from the frequent attacks of Indigenous tribes. In 1687, Fort Senneville and Fort Sainte-Anne (now known as Sainte-Anne-de-Bellevue) were attacked by the Iroquois. Fort Senneville was attacked again in 1691 and burned to the ground, leaving only the stone windmill remaining. Reconstruction began immediately and the new fortified Senneville was not attacked for decades. The military importance of this land diminished with The Great Peace of Montreal in 1701 with the fort being abandoned in 1760. Fort Senneville would later be occupied by the Americans in the Revolutionary War in 1776 who destroyed it when they eventually retreated south.

During the period of French rule before 1759, there was frequent tension between the urban centre of Montreal and the rural west of the Island. Administrators in Montreal wanted to attract trade with Indigenous peoples to the city and centralize control of their district, often opposing the westward expansion. The coureur-des-bois and fur trading entrepreneurs sought to outflank the city's controlling policies by pursuing illegal trade further inland and setting up competing trade posts in Île-Perrot and Sainte-Anne. This prompted Governor Frontenac to build forts to the West of Montreal with the pretext of defence to curb the contraband trade. In the end, however, the governor was forced to legalize the activities of the coureur-des-bois, opening the door to further French incursions into the interior.

In the late 17th century, the Sulpicians were active in evangelizing nearby native peoples. In the area of Dorval, the Sulpician mission of Gentilly taught children of the Nipissing and Algonquin agriculture and French. François D'Urfé baptized 300 Indigenous persons and founded the Parish of Saint-Louis-du-Bout-de-l'Île, later renamed Baie D'Urfé in his honour. In the early 1700s, René-Charles de Breslay constructed a chapel dedicated to Sainte-Anne located close to Fort Senneville and Tourtes Island. Two years after its construction, the parish was renamed Sainte-Anne-du-Bout-de-l'Île.

After the British conquest and the American Revolution, the West Island began to see its first English residents arrive, with 250 American loyalists settling in Pointe-Claire. However, the vast majority of the population of the western region of the island consisted of Francophone farmers well into the late 1800s. These rural communities, the côtes as they were called, were removed from the influence of urban Montreal and demonstrated a desire to be autonomous and independent from the city. In 1855, the Island of Montreal was divided into two counties, Hochelaga in the east and Jacques-Cartier in the West, the latter comprising the established parish municipalities of Saint-Laurent, Sainte-Genevieve, Sainte-Anne, Pointe-Claire and Lachine. Saint-Joachim-de-la-Pointe-Claire had already emerged as the largest municipality in the West Island as it was on the most direct route to the interior of the continent, but by 1891, Pointe-Claire's population dropped along with the county of Jacques-Cartier's share of the Island's population. This was due to the trend of urban migration during the late 1800s. Still, changes were on the horizon. New commuter railroads, such as the Grand Trunk in 1852 and the Canadian Pacific Railway in 1881, connected Montreal to the interior of North America, cutting through the rural West Island to do so. This facilitated new opportunities for development in the Island's western hinterlands. Through the late 19th century, wealthy Anglophone Montrealers, many living in the "Golden Mile," began to purchase summer cottages on the West Island. Most of these summer homes were in Senneville and Dorval, but the increased transportation opened new areas to wealthy vacationers such as Beaconsfield, Beaurepaire and Baie D'Urfé. After 1900, the municipalities of the West Island slowly grew with the arrival of new residents, primarily of British origin. Many of the original cottages of the wealthy Montrealers became permanent homes during the interwar period. This growth led to the incorporation of new towns and municipalities in the county of Jacques-Cartier: the village (1892) and then town (1912) of Dorval, the town of Sainte-Anne-de-Bellevue (1895), the village of Senneville (1895), the village of Sainte-Geneviève-de-Pierrefonds (1904), the town of Beaconsfield (1910), the town of Pointe-Claire (1911), the town of Baie D'Urfé (1911), the town of Roxboro (1914), and the town of Dollard-des-Ormeaux (1924).

Further expansions of mass transportation and the opening of the Dorval airport in 1941 would facilitate the post-war suburbanization of the West Island. After the 1950s the process of parcelling and subdividing farmland for residences accelerated rapidly. This flight to the suburbs, along with the steep increase in post-war immigration, led to the rapid population growth of the West Island municipalities. In 1961, the construction of Highway 40 and the commercial developments that sprang up around it pushed the last vestiges of rural Montreal to the margins of the Island's western communities. The building boom and population growth in this post-war period began to spread to the West Island first in Dollard-des-Ormeaux and Kirkland (incorporated in 1961), then to Île Bizard and Pierrefonds (incorporated in 1958), before moving on to the North and South Shore suburbs during the 1980s. Other factors leading to the demographic growth of the West Island included the internal migration of Anglophones in Quebec. The Quiet Revolution led many of the Anglophone minority to leave the province, but some migrated to Montreal, bolstering the English-speaking population in the suburbs.

The construction of new railroads, canals, and highways on the West Island from the 1850s through the post-war period emphasized Montreal's vital role as a logistical crossroads on one of the most important waterways in North America. This elevated the West Island's role from the rural periphery of the city to a vital link in its continental transportation network. Along the new Highway 40, the area around Dorval Airport grew to become the largest employment and industrial centre in the Montreal area. Ironically, however, the improved transportation networks in the West Island made the region more fragmented and less dependent on the central city. This led to the decentralization of the city and its suburbs, with the West Island constituting a distinct urban cluster with Vaudreuil. This new polycentric reality contributed to the already assertive sense of independence in the Montreal Island municipalities, particularly those with large Anglophone populations. Following the merger with Montreal of all the island municipalities in 2002, many of the western municipalities firmly opposed the move, eventually voting to "demerge" with Montreal. The debate surrounding the merger often had political and linguistic overtones. One local politician describes the attitude of the West Island during this period as "independent in spirit" insisting that they were "not going to bend to the city of Montreal and the Provincial Government".

In the 21st century, Montreal's West Island no longer represents the suburban bedroom neighbourhood it once was but exists as an urban employment centre in a polynuclear metropolis which also includes Montreal, Laval, and the South Shore. The Dorval Saint-Laurent sector along Highway 40 is also the largest commercial centre in the region alongside the urban core of Montreal. The

presence of this commercial activity has led to the demographic and economic diversification of the West Island's municipalities. Once the most affluent neighbourhoods in the Census Metropolitan area, the West Island – although still ahead in its relative affluence – is seeing increasing concentrations of low and middle-income earners in its various communities. These communities, especially the eastern municipalities, are also experiencing growth in the immigration of visible and religious minorities to the region. These changes bring new opportunities and challenges to the West Island.

2.3 Conclusion

From its beginnings as a French fur trading frontier to its settlement by seigneuries, summer cottages and suburbs, and finally, in becoming an economic centre and critical link in the Montreal continental transport economy, the West Island's history is inseparable from that of the city. The region has always been linked to, benefited from, and assisted in the development of the urban centre of Montreal. Yet, at each stage of its evolution, the West Island region has asserted its independence from the city. Whether through competing fur trading outposts, in the remote seigneuries on the rural French côtes, as distant country retreats for Montreal elites, or as a bastion of municipal or Anglophone autonomy, the West Island has consistently espoused a "close but not too close" relationship with Montreal and its governing authorities. Navigating the tension between collaboration and competition with the urban centre is one of the key legacies of the West Island's past and will likely be a continuing part of its future.

3.0

Community Portrait

3.1 Population and Population Change

The West Island communities have not seen the same population growth they experienced in the second half of the 20th century, with most experiencing modest population growth or even decline. The most significant growth is in Pointe-Claire at 6.7%, which is almost certainly due to the jump in seniors living in that city.

Population and Population Change from 2016 to 2021
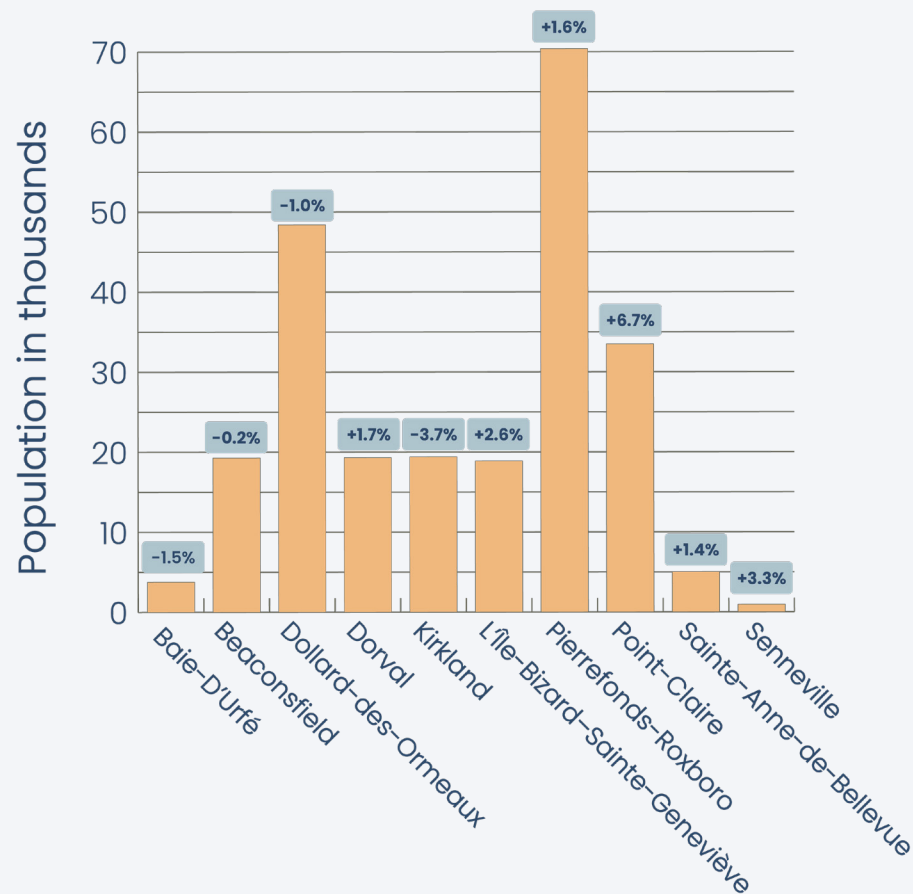
West Island population is 238,892 and it's population change is +1.1%

3.2 Age Distribution

The rise in the number of seniors has had a huge impact on the demographic trends across the West Island, with every municipality seeing a jump in those over 65 and most seeing proportions of 0-19-year-olds drop or remain the same. Despite this, the West Island still has a higher percentage of 0-19-year-olds than both the Montreal and Canadian averages. However, there is a significant lack of the 20-39 age demographic, especially in the higher-income areas of the western communities, suggesting a flight of younger working-age adults to more affordable areas. The overall picture of a higher-than-average number of under 19 and over 40-year-olds with a marked absence of younger adults paints a picture of a community made up mostly of families and seniors.

Age Distribution
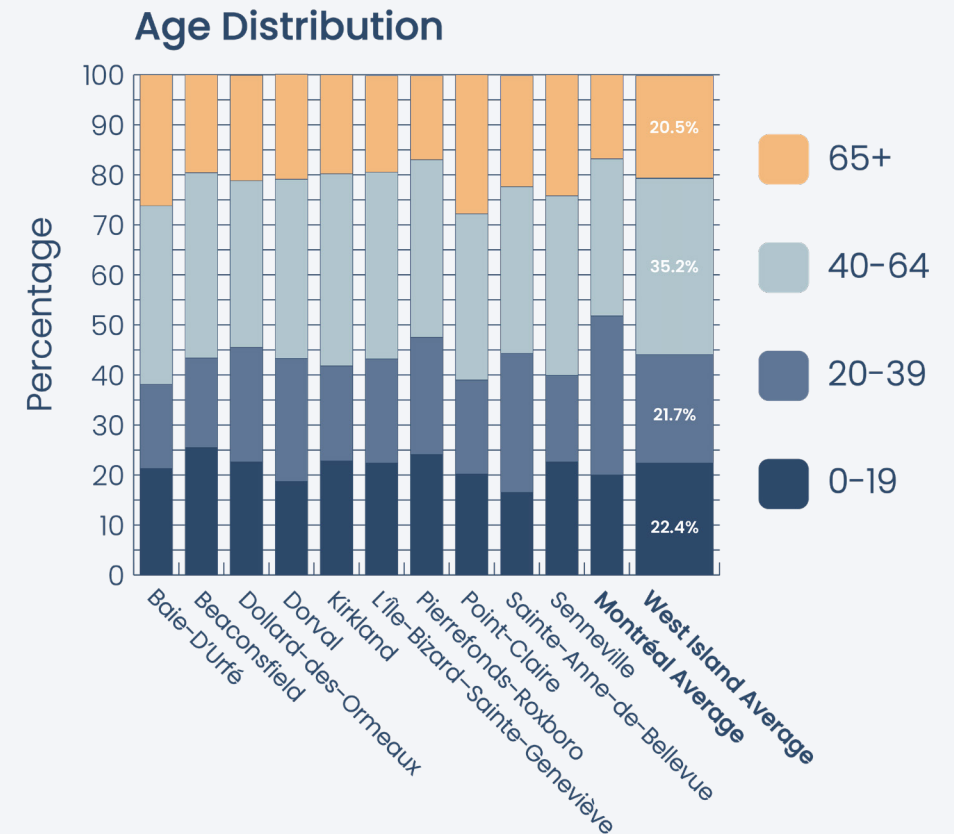
(For a detailed breakdown of each municipality, see Appendix 1: Community Portrait Datasets)

One of the issues that emerged from the respondents in our focus groups included the crisis among isolated seniors. One food bank told us they "used to serve a working class poor family and now the demographic has changed significantly and a lot of seniors are in crisis." Another community worker noted how seniors they worked with "don't go out anymore. They're afraid, fearful." The elderly are increasingly experiencing isolation after the pandemic, compounded by technological illiteracy and the rising cost of living. Many seniors appear to be disconnected from family and rely more and more on over-stretched community services. Community workers expressed rising concern over the state of vulnerable seniors in the community, with one worker saying, "They're not of a generation where they want to ask for help. So by the time they do, they're in crisis."

One of the issues that emerged from the respondents in our focus groups included the crisis among isolated seniors.
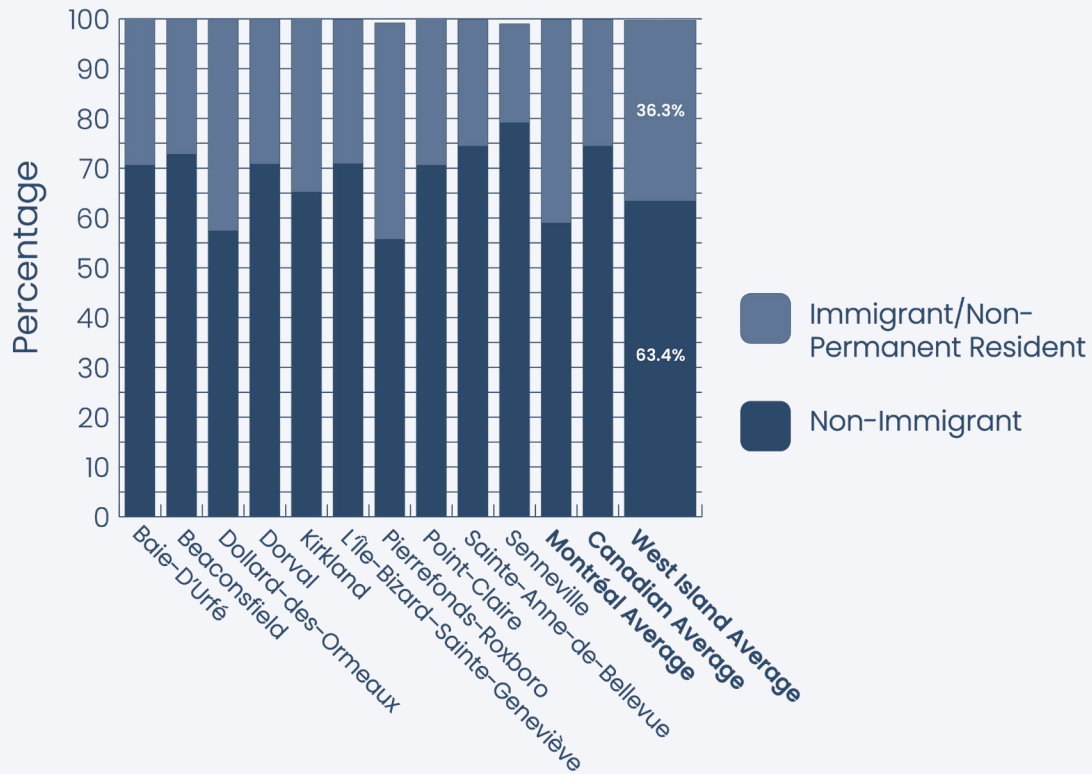
3.3 Immigration and Country of Origin

The West Island has a higher proportion of immigrants than the average in Canada but a smaller percentage of immigrants than Montreal. Most newcomers are concentrated in Pierrefonds, Dollard-des-Ormeaux, and, to a lesser extent, Kirkland. Dollard-des-Ormeaux, Pierrefonds, and Île-Bizard have large Arabic-speaking populations as well as a significant Asian diaspora and Haitian community as well. Kirkland has an extremely large Chinese community at 21.7% of its population. Pointe-Claire and Dorval also have large Asian communities of Chinese, Taiwanese, Filipino, and Indian descent. Baie D'Urfé and Beaconsfield have a higher proportion of European immigrants in addition to significant Persian and Chinese populations. Sainte-Anne and Senneville have the lowest percentage of immigrants on the West Island. Some diaspora communities make up a significant minority without being concentrated in one area, with people of Italian, Chinese, French, Romanian, British, American, and Persian descent each accounting for over two percent of the population across most if not all West Island municipalities.

Immigration

Bar chart showing Immigration percentages by municipality with two categories: Immigrant/Non-Permanent Resident and Non-Immigrant. Municipalities listed: Baie-D'Urfé, Beaconsfield, Dollard-des-Ormeaux, Dorval, Kirkland, L'Île-Bizard–Sainte-Geneviève, Pierrefonds-Roxboro, Pointe-Claire, Sainte-Anne-de-Bellevue, Senneville, **Montréal Average**, **West Island Average**, **Canadian Average** (36.3% Immigrant/Non-Permanent Resident, 63.4% Non-Immigrant).

Selected places of birth for the immigration population of each municipality (top 5):

Beaconsfield: China 15.8%, UK 8.5%, Iran 8.3%, Egypt 3.8%, India 3.6%

Kirkland: China 21.7%, Egypt 6.7%, Italy 6.4%, Iran 5.7%, India 5.6%

Dorval: Philippines 7.4%, China 6.9%, UK 4.6%, India 4%, Romanian 3.8%

Sainte-Anne-de-Bellevue: US 7.1%, China 7.1%, Philippines 6%, UK 4.9%, Iran 4.4%

Pierrefonds-Roxboro: Egypt 8.8%, Philippines 7.3%, India 6.1%, Haiti 5%, China 4.6%

Dollard-des-Ormeaux: India 10.6%, Philippines 8.4%, Egypt 6%, Lebanon 5.4%, China 4%

L'Île-Bizard–Sainte-Geneviève: Egypt 12.6%, China 6.2%, Philippines 5.8%, Lebanon 4.4%, Haiti 4.1%

Pointe-Claire: China 15%, UK 6.9%, India 6.1%, Iran 4.6%, Philippines 4%

Senneville: UK 27%, US 13.5%, Germany 13.5%, Poland 8.1%, Italy 5.4%

Baie-D'Urfé: UK 11.2%, France 10.7%, Germany 9.6%, China 7.1%, Iran 5.6%

The challenge of integrating newcomers was a recurring theme among our respondents. One community worker described encountering a resident who possessed Canadian citizenship but had never held an in-depth conversation with someone of French Canadian (Québécois) origin during their time in Canada. It was also repeatedly mentioned that many of these new immigrants struggled to integrate due to the language barrier, either because they did not know French, English or both. One healthcare worker noted the profound difficulty in reaching the immigrant population, many of whom struggle with very real trauma. He mentioned the high number of children of new immigrants in child protective services and the significant lack of foster parents with a common cultural origin to care for them. Despite this the strength of these newcomers was emphasized by one local pastor who noted that the "new arrivals have endured so much, they are survivors. They're incredibly brave." Overall, the integration of immigrants remains a huge challenge for the West Island community, especially in municipalities with larger immigrant populations such as Pierrefonds and D.D.O.

These new arrivals have endured so much, they are survivors. They're incredibly brave.
*- Local Pastor*

3.4 Language

The West Island's linguistic makeup is a mirror opposite to Montreal, at approximately 50% English and 20% French with similar levels of bilingualism. In descending order, the most heavily Anglophone municipalities are Baie D'Urfé, Beaconsfield, Pointe-Claire, Sainte-Anne, and Senneville. The largest francophone populations live in Île-Bizard (the only municipality with more French speakers than English), Senneville, Sainte-Anne, Dorval, and Pierrefonds. The communities with the largest percentages of non-official language speakers are Pierrefonds and Dollard-des-Ormeaux with 22% each and Kirkland at 18%, corresponding to the largest immigrant populations. The largest linguistic minorities in the West Island are Arabic and Mandarin. Pierrefonds, Dollard-des-Ormeaux, Île-Bizard and Kirkland have the largest populations of Arabic speakers while Kirkland, Beaconsfield, Pointe-Claire, and Dorval have the largest Mandarin-speaking populations. Spanish and Persian speakers also make up significant linguistic minorities in Pierrefonds, Dollard-des-Ormeaux, Île Bizard, Kirkland and Beaconsfield. Additionally, Romanian and Russian are notable language groups in Pierrefonds while Tagalog and Tamil represent smaller minorities in Dollard-des-Ormeaux.

> *Access to available services is often hindered by people's lack of knowledge of French, English, or both.*

Language Spoken Most Often at Home
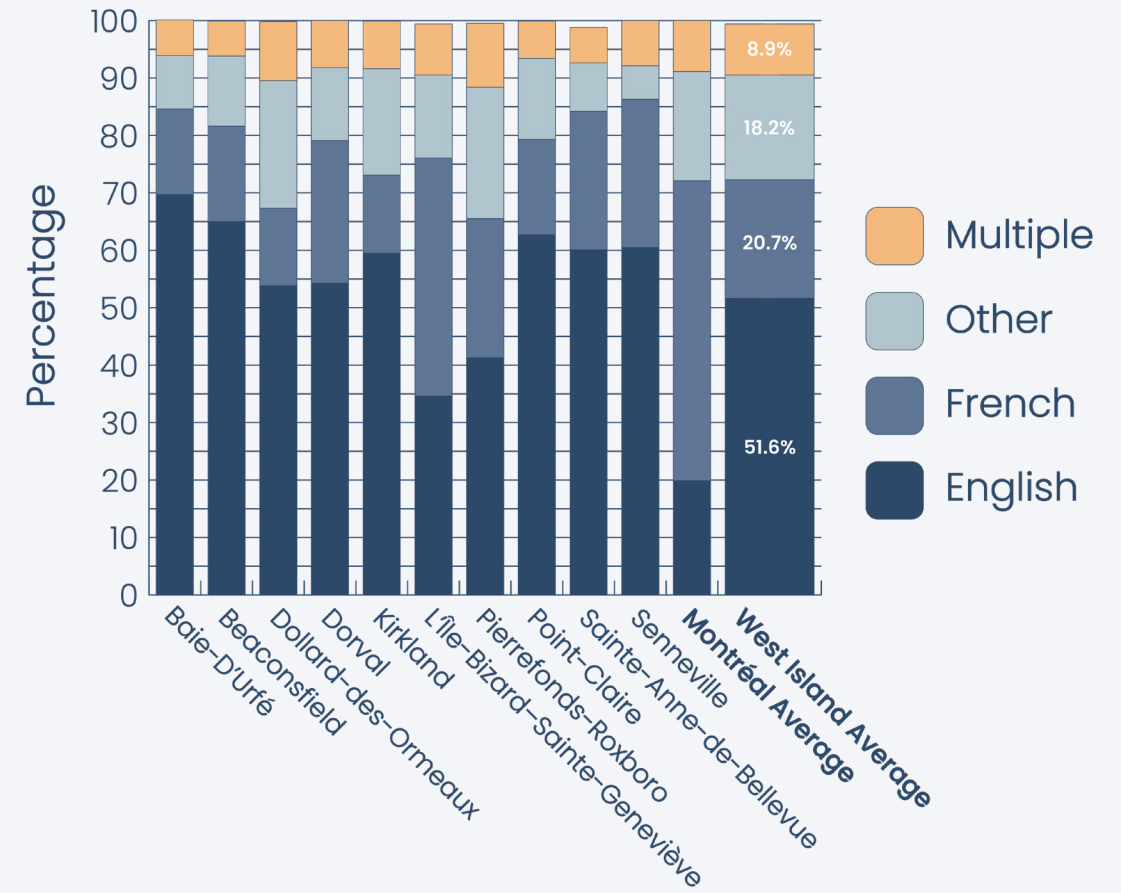
Language was often cited as a challenge to providing services and integrating new immigrants into the local culture by many community workers. Access to available services is often hindered by people's lack of knowledge of French, English, or both. Additionally, a lack of linguistic proficiency among parents can put their kids at a disadvantage when they need to help with their school work or communicate with their teachers. Raising awareness of services available to people, especially new immigrants, can be hampered by the lack of volunteers or staff who speak minority languages as well, leading to high demand for translators among service providers in the region. One community worker told us that she "would love to have someone that can speak every language in the book" to communicate with the plethora of linguistic groups they served in the community.

Religion

Perhaps the biggest surprise in the 2021 Census data, is the reported levels of religiosity in the West Island. While religious affiliation has seen a marked decline in the past two decades in Canada and throughout the Island of Montreal, the West Island is still seeing levels of religious adherence well above the national average and that of the Montreal CMA. While many of these respondents may be "culturally religious", this is not a sufficient explanation. While the West Island has the same percentage of professing Catholics as Montreal, it has over 7% fewer "none/secular" respondents. In addition, the West Island has far more mainline Protestants per capita than Montreal, but still less than the national average, and a similar number of non-affiliated Christians as Montreal and the rest of Canada.

Where the Western communities stand out is in their proportion of Orthodox Christian, Jewish, and Hindu respondents. These groups represent a much larger percentage of the population than Montreal or the rest of Canada. There is also a significant Muslim population on the West Island, although smaller than Montreal's. The municipality with the highest number of religious respondents also has the least Catholic respondents; Dollard-des-Ormeaux. D.D.O. has a very high number of Orthodox Christians, Jews, Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs. Pierrefonds is also very religious with the highest proportion of non-affiliated Christians at 8.3%, Orthodox Christians at 8.2%, and Muslims at 12.2%. Interestingly, the areas with the most secular respondents correspond with the communities with the least immigration: Baie D'Urfé, Beaconsfield, Dorval, Sainte-Anne, and Senneville.

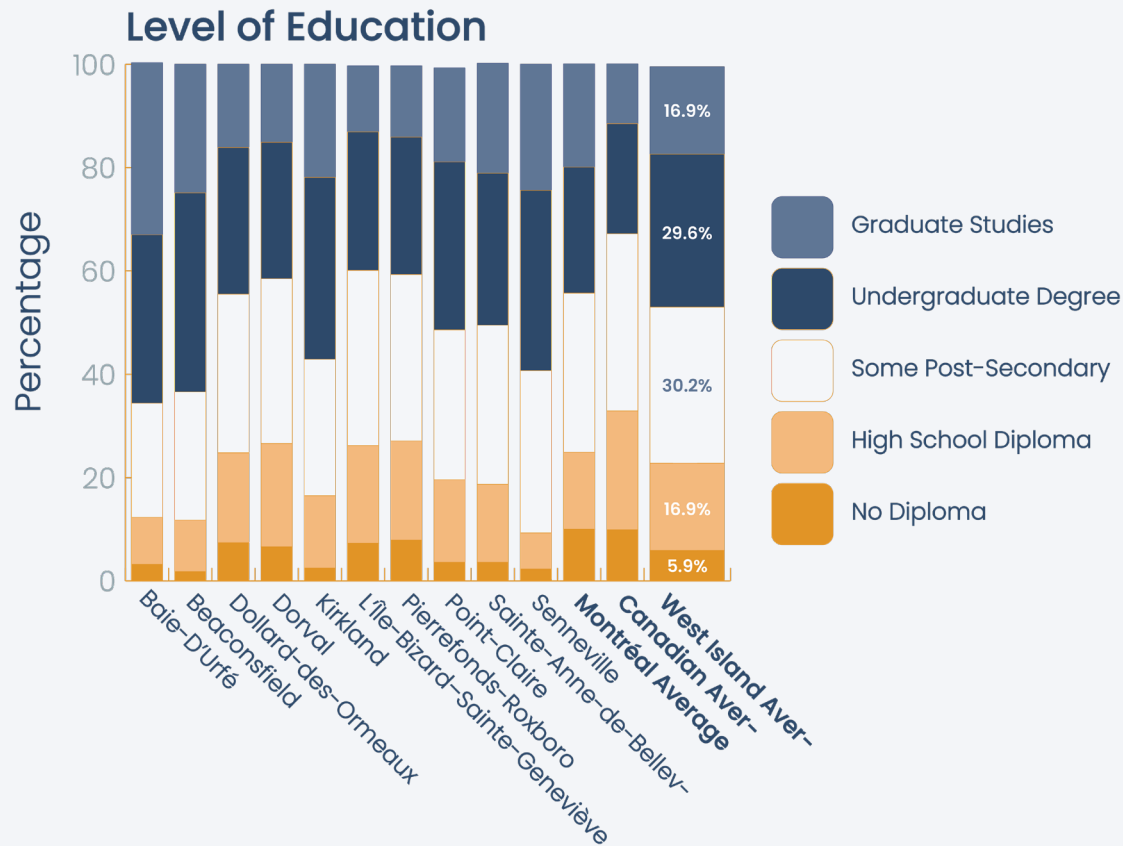## Religion in the West Island
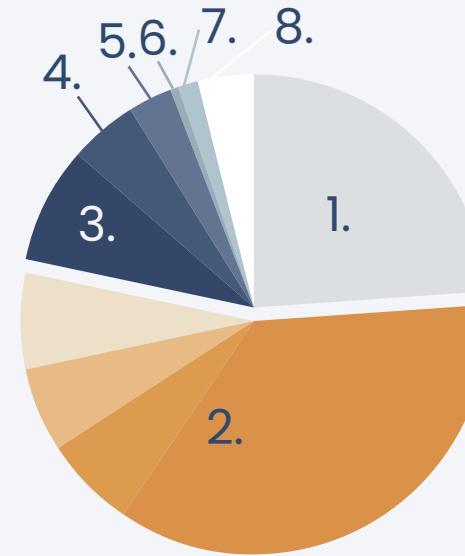
1. **Secular (23.8%)**
2. **Christian (54.1%)**
   Catholic (35.4%), Protestant (6.2%), Christian Non-Affiliated** (6.0%), Orthodox (6.5%)
3. **Muslim (8.1%)**
4. **Jewish (4.5%)**
5. **Hindu (3.2%)**
6. **Buddhist (0.6%)**
7. **Sikh (1.2%)**
8. **Other* (3.8%)**

> *While religious affiliation has seen a marked decline in the past two decades in Canada and throughout the Island of Montreal, the West Island is still seeing levels of religious adherence well above the national average and that of the Montreal CMA.*

*The statistics for "Other" include Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, non-trinitarian denominations, and those categorized as "Other Christian."
** This roughly corresponds to those who would otherwise identify as "Evangelical Christian

Level of Education

The West Island has a highly educated population. It is ahead of Montreal and Canada in its levels of high school graduation and post-secondary education, with 46.4% of the population possessing a bachelor's degree or higher. However, there remain significant disparities in education levels between the West Island communities. While most of the municipalities only see between 1-3% of the population dropping out of high school, Pierrefonds, Île Bizard, D.D.O., and Dorval's drop-out rate is at 7%. The most educated areas are Baie D'Urfé, Beaconsfield, Sainte-Anne, and Senneville with 80-90% of the population having some post-secondary education.

Level of Education

Legend:
- Graduate Studies
- Undergraduate Degree
- Some Post-Secondary
- High School Diploma
- No Diploma

Values labeled on final bar: 16.9%, 29.6%, 30.2%, 16.9%, 5.9%

There remain significant disparities in education levels between the West Island communities.

A lack of linguistic proficiency among parents can put their kids at a disadvantage when they need to help with their school work or communicate with their teacher.

Household Income

Overall, the West Island fares better than the rest of Canada in its high rates of household income, and much higher than the Montreal average. However, there are significant disparities in income across West Island communities. Municipalities like Senneville, Baie D'Urfé, Beaconsfield, and Kirkland have the lowest numbers of households earning under 50k as well as the most earning over 100k. This contrasts with Sainte-Anne-de-Bellevue and Dorval which have the highest number of households earning under 50k as well as the most considered "low-income". The rationale for such modest earnings in Sainte-Anne might be due to the large student population; a similar explanation appears to be absent in Dorval. Despite this, most communities in the West Island have a fairly average percentage of low-income households compared with the rest of Canada. The difference lies in the small number of middle-class households earning 50-100k annually. This could correspond with the lack of younger adults living and working in the West Island who would be more likely to fit into this bracket.

> *Some respondents decried the "thinking that the English don't need any help" or that "in the West Island, people wrongly assume that everybody is rich".*

One of the problems that was repeatedly emphasized was the perception of wealth in the West Island. Many community workers decried this attitude which was ignoring very real problems and preventing the appropriate servicing for their communities. Some respondents decried the "thinking that the English don't need any help" or that "in the West Island, people wrongly assume that everybody is rich". However because a large proportion of above-average income earners live in the West Island, people struggling with poverty are often overlooked in statistics which are used to allocate funding. But these only represent averages in an area with vast wealth disparities. This "wealth-washing" of communities prevents those in need from getting the services they rely on or getting the funding they need. In addition, the hiddenness of poverty in the West Island is made worse by the absence of shelters or crisis centres, leading many community workers to send clients to Montreal to seek help. This puts already vulnerable people into higher risk situations and masks the real needs in the West Island.
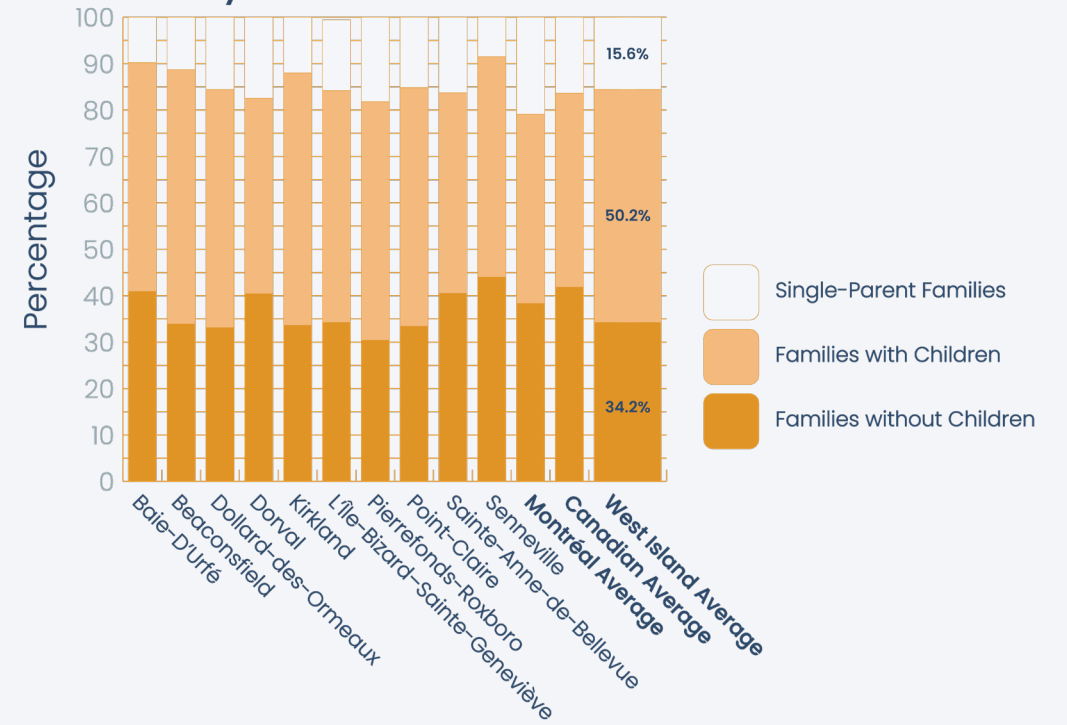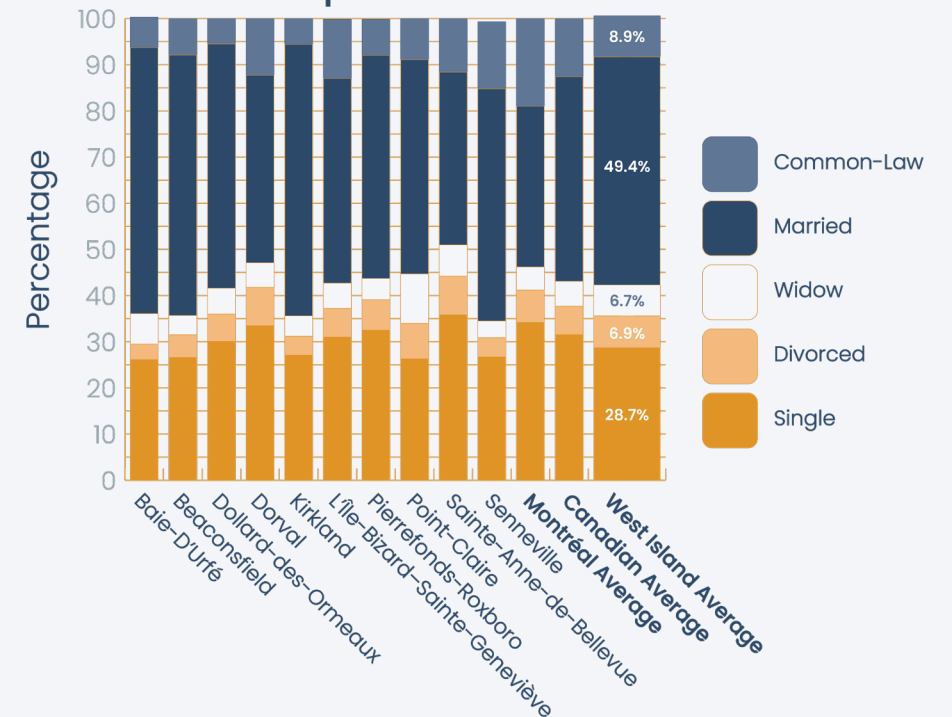
Household Income
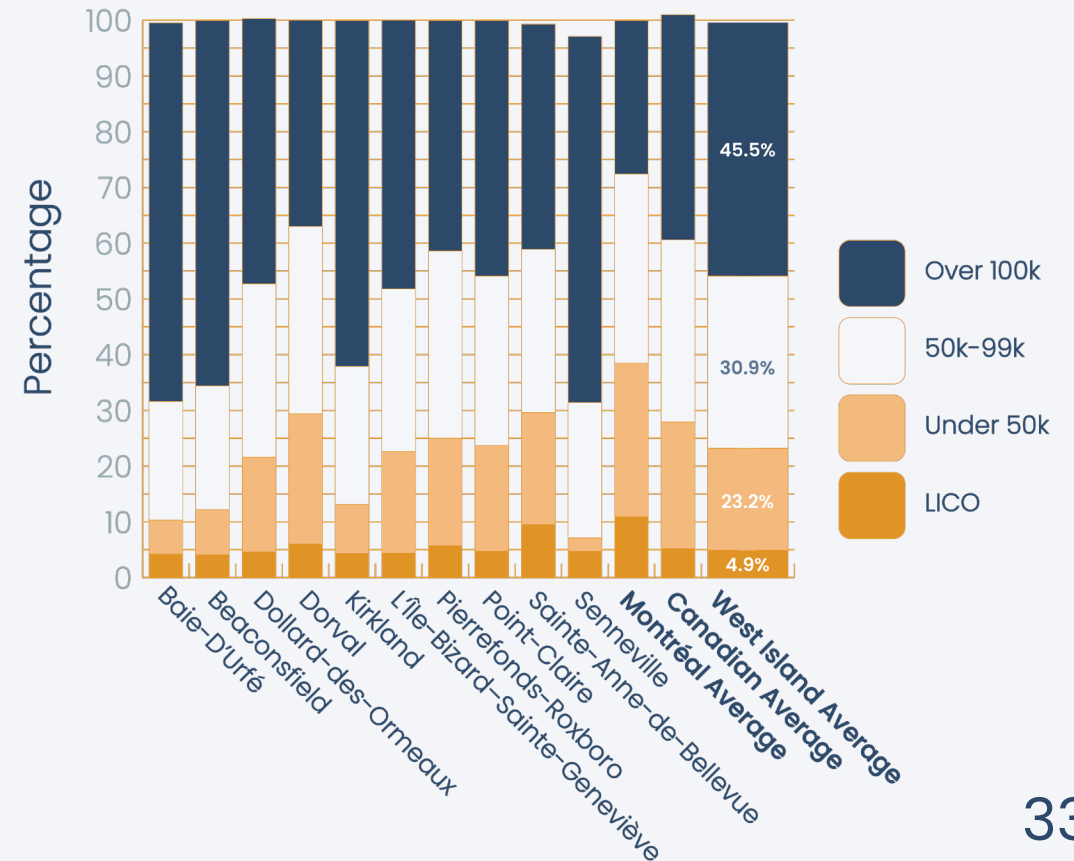
3.8 Family Status

On the surface, the West Island appears to have a large number of traditional families compared with Montreal. This often serves as an indicator of socio-economic stability and protection for children. The West Island has more proportional marriages, fewer common-law relationships, more families with children, and fewer single-parent families than the Montreal and Canadian averages. However, there remain geographic disparities in this category like others in this study. Sainte-Anne-de-Bellevue, likely due to the high student population, has the largest number of singles of any municipality. Dorval and Sainte-Anne also have the lowest number of marriages alongside higher than average numbers of single people divorced. Kirkland, Baie D'Urfé and Île-Bizard-Sainte-Genevieve have the highest percentages of marriages. Senneville, Dorval, and Île-Bizard also have the highest percentages of common-law relationships in the West Island. The municipalities seeing the largest number of families with children are Beaconsfield, Kirkland, Dollard-des-Ormeaux, Pierrefonds, and Pointe-Claire. Again, Sainte-Anne and Dorval have fewer numbers of families with children. The rates of single-parent families are highest in Pierrefonds, Sainte-Anne and Dorval, while Baie D'Urfé, Beaconsfield and Senneville have the least. Finally, many of the West Island municipalities have higher than average numbers of widows, accounting for 10% of its single population, Pointe-Claire has the most number of widows, followed by Sainte-Anne and Baie D'Urfé.
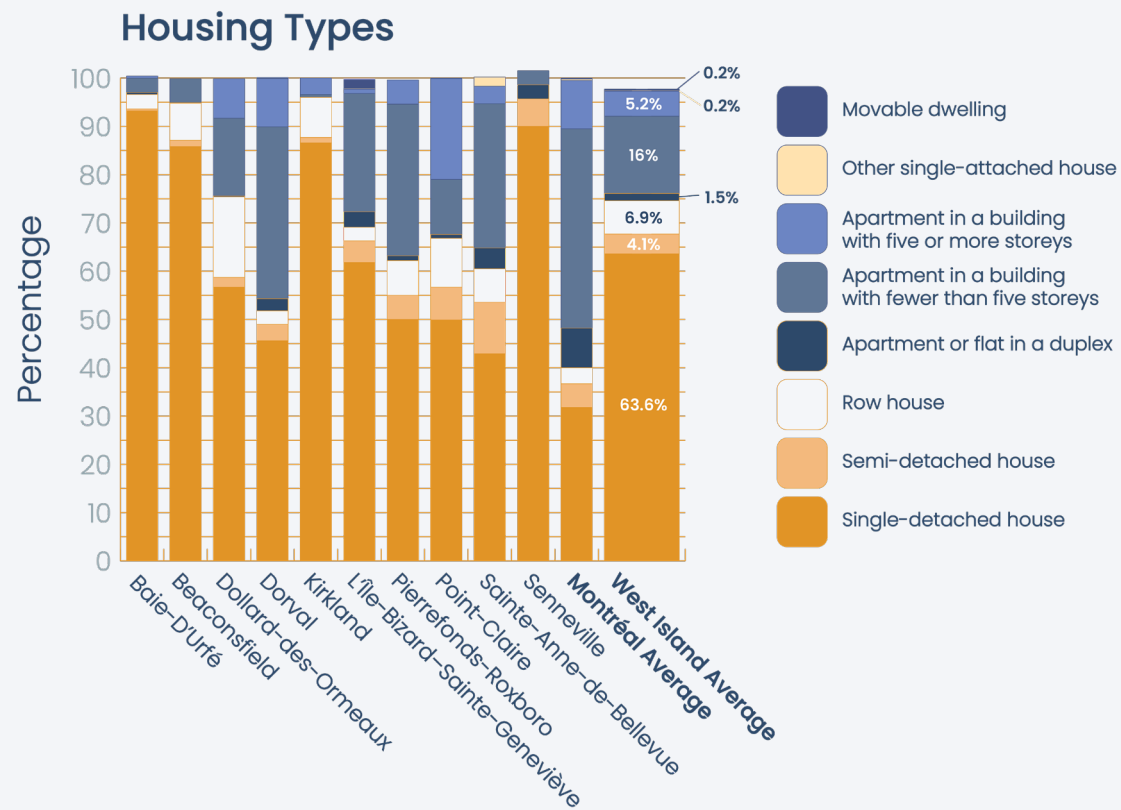
Family Status

Percentage

Legend:
- Single-Parent Families
- Families with Children
- Families without Children

Data labels: 15.6%, 50.2%, 34.2%

X-axis categories: Baie-D'Urfé, Beaconsfield, Dollard-des-Ormeaux, Dorval, Kirkland, L'Île-Bizard-Sainte-Geneviève, Pierrefonds-Roxboro, Point-Claire, Sainte-Anne-de-Bellevue, Senneville, Montréal Average, Canadian Average, West Island Average

Relationship Status

Percentage

Legend:
- Common-Law
- Married
- Widow
- Divorced
- Single

Data labels: 8.9%, 49.4%, 6.7%, 6.9%, 28.7%

X-axis categories: Baie-D'Urfé, Beaconsfield, Dollard-des-Ormeaux, Dorval, Kirkland, L'Île-Bizard-Sainte-Geneviève, Pierrefonds-Roxboro, Point-Claire, Sainte-Anne-de-Bellevue, Senneville, Montréal Average, Canadian Average, West Island Average

3.9 Housing Types

There is a great diversity of housing types across the West Island. Overall, there are more single-detached homes and fewer low-rise apartments on the West Island compared with Montreal. Baie D'Urfé, Senneville, Beaconsfield and Kirkland have the least diverse housing options with 85-93% of their housing stock being single-detached homes. Sainte-Anne, Dorval and Pointe-Claire have the fewest number of single-detached homes with the difference being made up primarily of low-rise (under five storeys) apartments or mid-rise (over five storeys) in the case of Pointe-Claire. D.D.O. and Pierrefonds maintain a fairly diverse spread of housing options with only half of their dwellings being single-detached homes.

Housing Types

Legend:
- Movable dwelling
- Other single-attached house
- Apartment in a building with five or more storeys
- Apartment in a building with fewer than five storeys
- Apartment or flat in a duplex
- Row house
- Semi-detached house
- Single-detached house

Montréal Average values: 0.2%, 0.2%, 5.2%, 16%, 1.5%, 6.9%, 4.1%, 63.6%

X-axis categories: Baie-D'Urfé, Beaconsfield, Dollard-des-Ormeaux, Dorval, Kirkland, Île-Bizard-Sainte-Geneviève, Pierrefonds-Roxboro, Point-Claire, Sainte-Anne-de-Bellevue, Senneville, **Montréal Average, West Island Average**
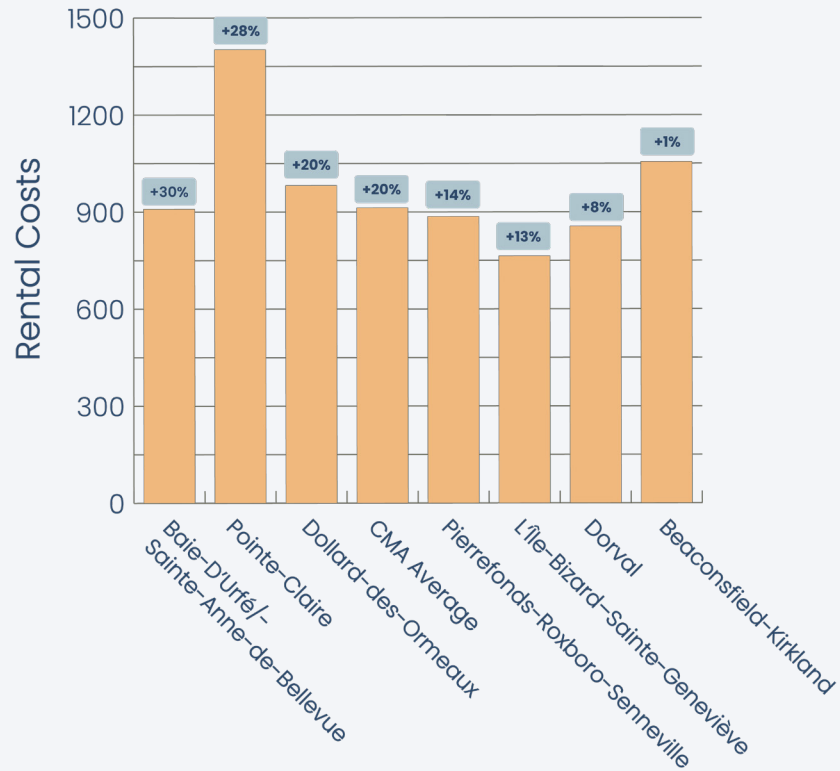
3.10 Rental Costs

Once again, huge disparities exist in the cost of renting on the West Island. The southern municipalities of the West Island (Baie-d'Urfé, Beaconsfield, Kirkland, Pointe-Claire, Senneville, Sainte-Anne-de-Bellevue) are more expensive with an average one-bedroom apartment costing $1255 and a two-bedroom costing $1566. The northern municipalities (Dollard-des-Ormeaux, Île-Bizard-Sainte-Geneviève, Pierrefonds, and Senneville) are more affordable at an average cost of $831 for a one-bedroom apartment and $949 for a two-bedroom. Dorval is cheaper on average than the rest of the West Island at $766 for a one-bedroom and $921 for a two-bedroom apartment.

Rental Costs and Change from 2016 to 2021

This graphic shows the disparities in rental costs in the West Island municipalities. Interestingly, some communities have matched or greatly outpaced the average increase in Montreal (Census Metropolitan Area), likely owing to increasing demand in these locations (Pointe-Claire, Sainte-Anne-de-Bellevue, Dollard-des-Ormeaux). The rest of the West Island has seen slower growth in rental prices, with Beaconsfield and Kirkland having virtually no growth, though these have extremely limited rental stocks to offer.

* Source – CMH Rental Market Survey

4.0
Community Organizations
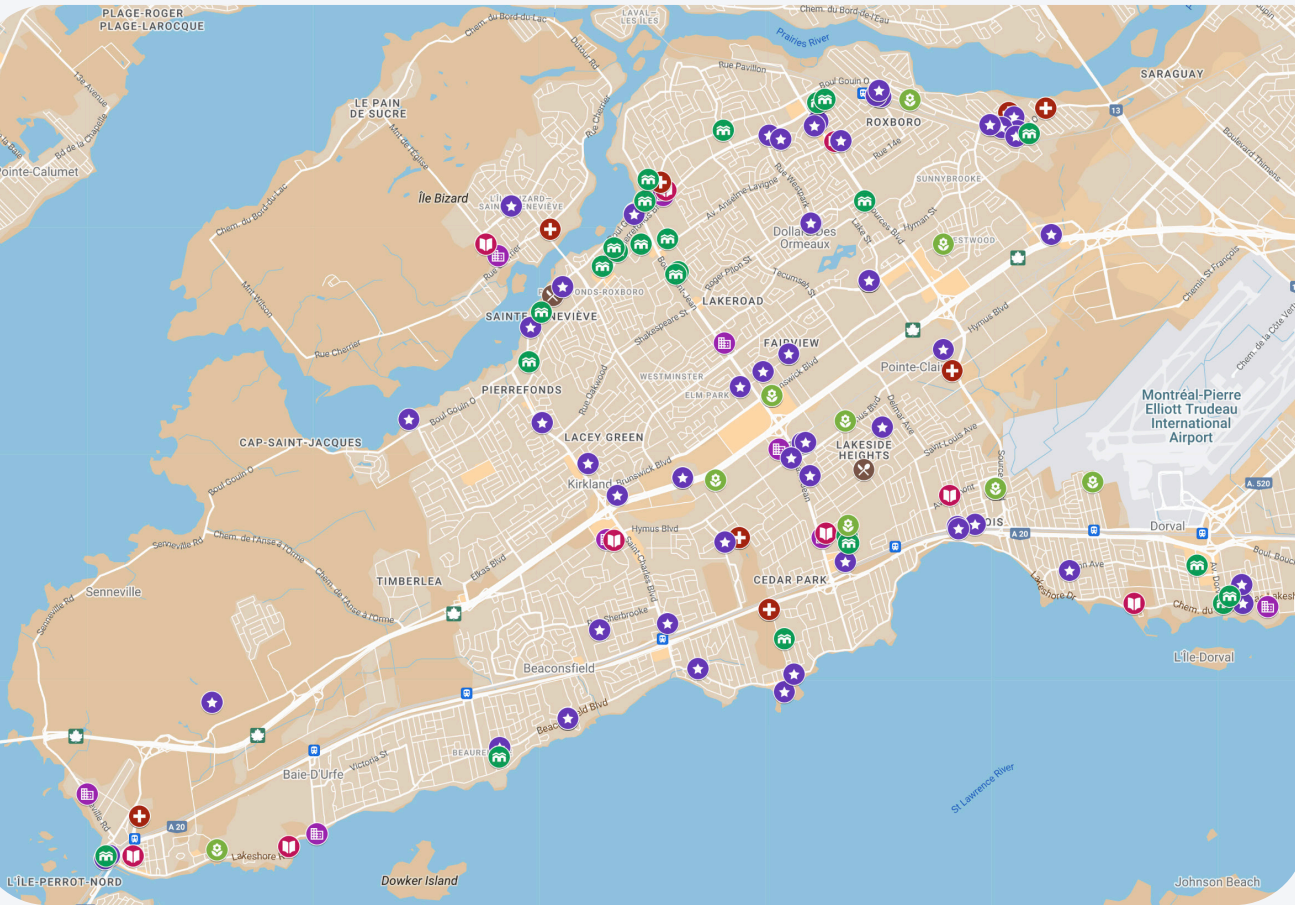
FIGURE 4A – COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS MAP

Legend

 City Halls

 Libraries

 Public Health

 Community Housing

 Food Assistance Organizations

 Community Organizations

 Community Gardens
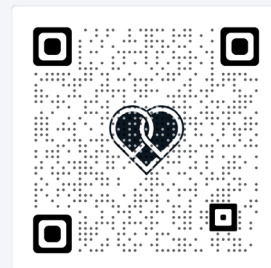
4.1 **Strengths**

The West Island has a rich tapestry of community services and organizations. Over 70 nonprofits serve the region providing vital support to the community and beyond. For example, the three major food banks, On Rock, West Island Mission, and West Island Assistance Fund serve approximately 1000 families on the West Island. Many of these services consider their staff and volunteers as their biggest strengths. The head of one community organization reported that "what makes us work well and helps us make a difference is that we have people on our team who are so passionate and flexible and willing to get paid a bit less than if they worked in the public system or the private sector. So I think that people are our greatest resource". Similarly, many community sector workers highlighted that looking after their staff was a critical element that ensured the sustainability of services being offered to the West Island.

Another key strength for these organizations was cooperation and communication between different service providers. Mutual support and collaboration were repeatedly emphasized as an advantage for organizations working on the West Island; from the database of the Community Resource Centre, the mobilization of volunteers at Volunteer West Island, church networks like WIN, or the shared resources or referrals between private and public organizations, the complimentary and diverse services being offered to the community are truly precious for the flourishing of the West Island.

The West Island has a rich tapestry of community services and organizations. Over 70 nonprofits serve the region providing vital support to the community and beyond.

4.2 **Limitations**

Many of those working in community services were eager to point out significant limitations to their work on the West Island. One of the most prominent was chronic understaffing and under-resourcing in the face of growing needs which exacerbate staff burnout and feelings of being overwhelmed. Many of our respondents noted how situations they were facing at work were the worst they had ever seen while at the same time expressing a sense of hopelessness about the problems and their ability to address them. One worker told us, "I personally feel overwhelmed by everything that's happening in the world because we put so much effort and energy and our heart into what we do. At some point, we need to protect ourselves." A local Police Officer shared, "The SPVM is missing 400-500 police officers and we're working overtime all the time." These factors are leading many in the community sector or government services to burnout. These stressors also seemed to provoke frustrations towards the government, the churches, or the community at large over an apparent apathy in the face of growing challenges for community services. The community sector appears to be in desperate need of a more hopeful vision of the work they do.

Other challenges for community organizations are an overall lack of awareness about the services they are offering and general opposition to the development of services from the community. One local politician summarized the problem by saying, "Unless you need an organization, you don't even know of it even though they do such a good job in communicating and publicizing and being out in the community." The number of community organizations operating in the West Island also presents challenges to the cooperation between organizations despite a willingness to work together. One worker noted how nobody knows everything going on with community services in the West Island, because there is just so much. Amid the plurality of organizations, however, many people are unaware of the existence, let alone the available services, of a particular organization and sometimes that ignorance exists among community groups as well.

Additionally, a vocal minority of residents or even local government officials are often opposed to the establishment of needed services in the community. A local politician shared that "Everybody perceives these types of facilities to be, you know, bad for the community and property values and all that." Some community workers even reported being harassed and their clients intimidated at zoning meetings by hostile residents who oppose new projects in their community. However, this opposition to new projects does not solve the issues but only leads to a lack of available services in the West Island and the relocation of vulnerable people in the community to the highly serviced boroughs of Montreal. This outsources problems and places already vulnerable people in dangerous situations, disconnecting them from their local support networks.

The community sector appears to be in desperate need of a more hopeful vision of the work they do.

Opposition to new projects does not solve the issues, but only leads to a lack of available services in the West Island and the relocation of vulnerable people in the community to the highly serviced boroughs of Montreal.

4.3 **Needs**

The most urgent need that community workers articulated was to be properly resourced for the work they do. This includes getting more volunteers, acquiring more funding, and having appropriate spaces to do their work. Many noted a decrease in their volunteer base after the pandemic that they were struggling to recover. Often the available resources are also failing to meet the rising demand as more people are experiencing crisis and relying on food banks or shelters. Another huge need for these organizations is the approval of new projects and facilities or the availability of spaces to house their operations and provide their services. Ultimately, whether it be volunteers, funding, donations, or spaces to work, community organizations want to provide services to those who need them, and often this is simply a matter of raising awareness in the community about what is available. One worker summarized this by saying "The goal is to have people actually be able to have access to our resources because they exist and we're trying so hard working for funding and all of these things and they don't even [take advantage of it]."

> *The most urgent need that community workers articulated was to be properly resourced for the work they do.*
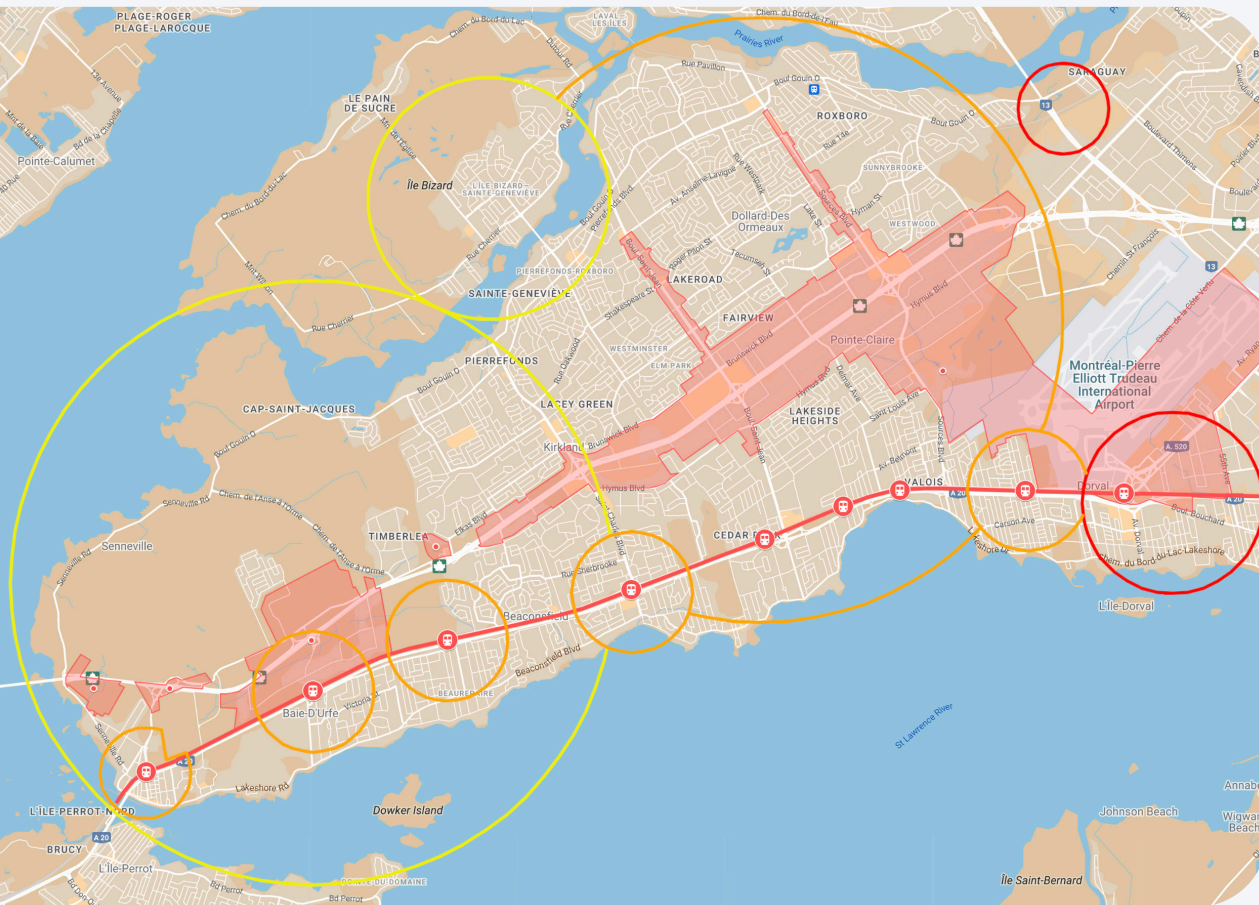
5.0

West Island Development

*FIGURE 5A – CURRENT WEST ISLAND DEVELOPMENT*

FIGURE 5B – FUTURE WEST ISLAND DEVELOPMENT

Legend

Current Mixed/Commercial Use

Exo Line

Exo Stations: *Dorval, Valois, Point-Clare, Cedar Park, Beaconsfield, Beaurepaire, Baie D'Urfé, Saint-Anne-de-Bellevue, Pine Beach*

Housing Density

8-15 Dwelling Units/Hectare

35-40 Dwelling Units/Hectare

80 Dwelling Units/Hectare

Legend

New Development Projects

Sectors for Development

Grand Parc de l'Ouest

REM Lines: *Aéroporte Montréal-Trudeau, Deux-Montagnes, L'Anse à L'Orme*

REM Stations: *Sunnybrooke, Pierrefonds-Roxboro, Des-Sources, Fairview-Point-Claire, Kirkland, L'Anse-à-L'Orme, Aéroport Montréal-Trudeau, Marie-Curie*
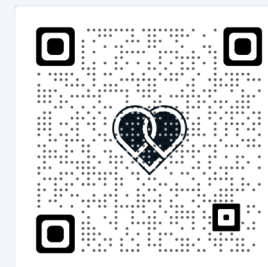
5.1 Development Challenges

A special challenge facing the West Island, though certainly not unique to this community, is the problem of development of both new housing and community services. The housing crisis is affecting communities across Canada, and the West Island is no exception. Despite promises from the City of Montreal to incentivize developers to build affordable housing, these developers have opted to bypass city regulations by paying fines rather than including social housing units. The result has been a complete absence of affordable housing being built in any of the 24 current housing developments underway on the West Island. This expectation for private developers to shoulder the burden of affordable housing is also problematic since it makes development unprofitable while the government itself consistently fails to fund new housing projects. This is leading to a departure of young adults and young families from the West Island community in search of affordable places to live. This partially explains the demographic gap of 20-39 year olds seen earlier in this report.

People are heading to Magog or the South-West, they're leaving the West Island because there is no housing!   *– Community Worker*

Additionally, new projects that attempt to meet the need for increasing housing density or organizations providing services to vulnerable populations are frequently opposed by municipalities or residents. The frustration towards this attitude is palpable, as those attempting to meet pressing needs are consistently rebuffed or even met with hostility. One community worker told us about zoning meetings where, "I've been intimidated going to the bathroom. I've been insulted. People are not welcoming when it comes to creating resources and housing solutions for vulnerable people." This sometimes aggressive opposition hinders the West Island's ability to adapt to the challenges it is facing with housing, homelessness, and poverty. As we have seen, the result of this opposition is the departure of young people from the community, either because they cannot afford to live on the West Island or because they need services that are not available to them in the community. The resistance the West Island is experiencing from certain groups to development appears to be a symptom of an identity crisis for a community vacillating between a suburban bedroom community and a distinct urban centre.

The people who are pushing back against those things, they've got to get their head out of the sand because they are just a family member's situation away from needing those or even a number of years away from needing those in the case of assisted residential care for seniors.   *– Local Pastor*

Churches

6.0

FIGURE 6A – WEST ISLAND RELIGIONS MAP

Legend

✝ Churches

✝ Para-Church Ministries

✡ Jewish Centres

⟨⟩ Dollard-des-Ormeaux Eiruv

☪ Muslim Centres

🕉 Hindu Centres

☬ Sikh Centres

☸ Buddhist Centres

🕌 Jehovah's Witness Centres

Mormon Centre

🏛 Freemason Centre
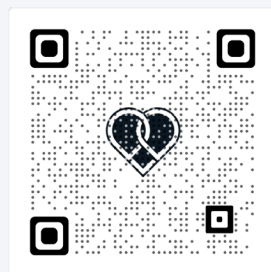
6.1 West Island Church Statistics

75 *Total Churches in the West Island*

| 18 Catholic | 5 Orthodox | 23 Protestant | 29 Evangelical |

🏠 Filled in: churches who own their building

⌂ Outline: church who don't own their building
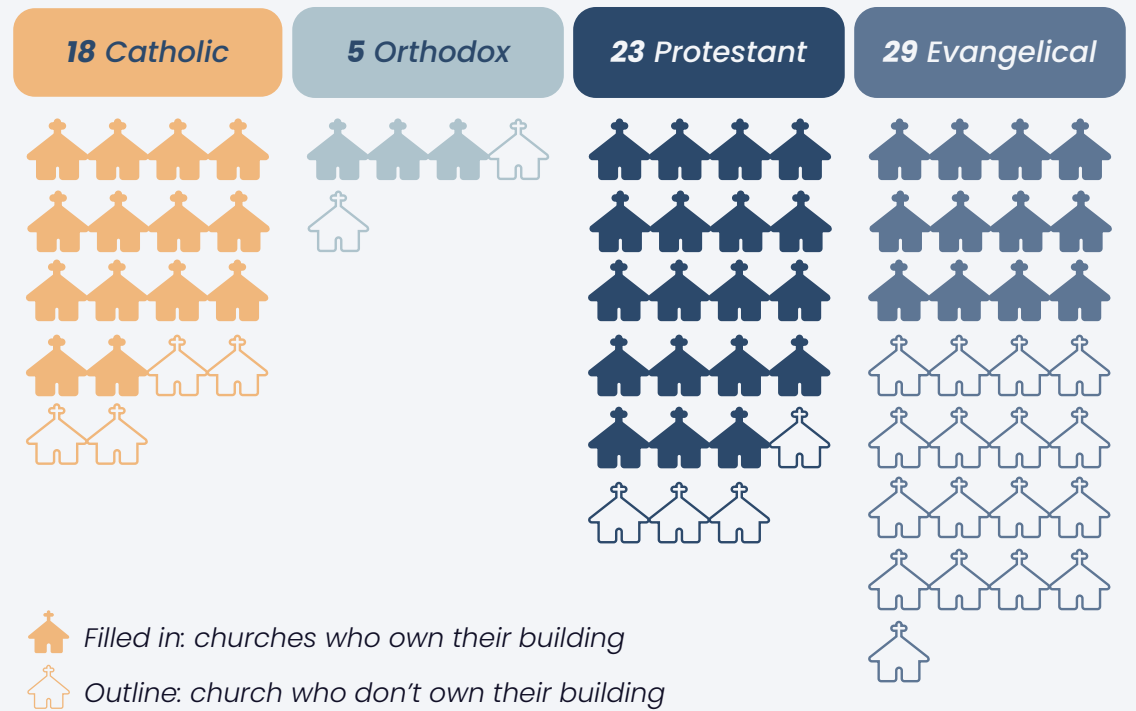
Languages Spoken in Churches
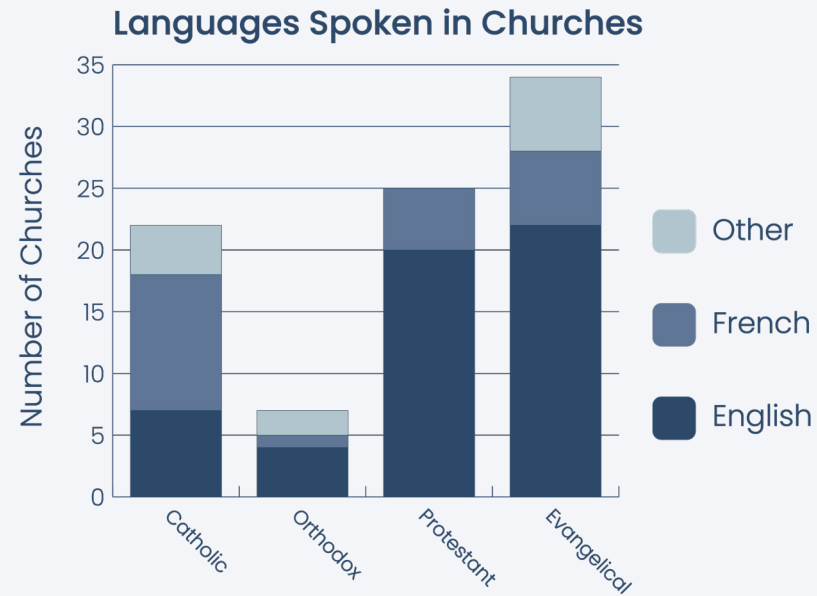
Average membership* 123.75

Average attendance* 113.75

	# of Churches	Total Income	Average Income
Catholic	17	$4,346,984	**$255,704**
Orthodox	5	$3,169,799	**$633,959**
Protestant	22	$4,355,987	**$197,999**
Evangelical	24	$5,226,816	**$217,784**
Total	68	$17,0.99,587	**$251,464**

1.8 average full-time staff**

2.4 average part-time staff**

*Out of eight total Churches surveyed in 2023
**Out of 43 Churches reported in 2021

6.2 **Strengths**

The West Island is dotted with a large number of churches from various denominations, approximately 75 at the time of writing. This number changes frequently as new churches open and others close. One of the strengths of West Island churches noted by some of our respondents was the increasing collaboration between churches and openness to working together. This collaboration is evidenced by corporate prayer or worship gatherings, interfaith services, or church networks like the West Island Network.* In addition to a large number of churches, many of these have significant resources available to them, such as volunteers, property, or finances that can be mobilized to serve their members and have a disproportionately positive impact on the surrounding community. The West Island Network of churches was recognized for its donations, support, and provision of spaces to community organizations serving the region. Many churches are also running various programs that serve their members and those outside their congregation, alleviating some of the burden for exhausted community organizations.

Additionally, the abundance of new arrivals to the West Island is providing a boost to churches in a post-Christian culture. One pastor told us that "new immigrants bring a more active and militant faith with them, adapt to the Quebec culture, and bring new life to the Church in Quebec". On top of this, people within the church are adapting to the challenges of living in a society that does not make space for religious practice by adopting new and creative ways to gather, worship, and practice their Christian faith.

One of the strengths of West Island churches noted by some of our respondents was the increasing collaboration between churches and openness to working together.

*This view was expressed by Protestant/Evangelical Churches and is not necessarily reflective of collaboration with Catholic and Orthodox Christian denominations.

Limitations

Unfortunately, churches in the West Island are facing many challenges to their health and engagement in the community. Like many religious groups in Canada, many churches of the West Island are experiencing declining membership as a significant hindrance to being more active in their neighbourhood. Less participation in the church means a smaller volunteer base to draw from. This feeds a vicious cycle of lower engagement in the community leading to lower attendance and so forth. One pastor explained that "as the church becomes smaller and its volunteer base shrinks it can do less in the community, but it needs to engage the community in order to survive", describing this as a "chicken and egg problem". Community workers recognized this problem but emphasized service in the community saying that "churches are trying to also stay relevant and finance their own needs, but they also have to be giving back to their community. That's the whole purpose of being in a community". Another challenge is the working culture in Quebec which leaves little space for personal religious practice, with many families or working adults being scheduled for jobs or children's activities on Sundays or at other times that conflict with church functions. Sometimes the busy schedule simply leaves people too exhausted to consider attending another event at church. These cultural trends affect the church's ability to be active in the lives of people in their community.

One pastor explained that "as the church becomes smaller and its volunteer base shrinks it can do less in the community, but it needs to engage the community in order to survive", describing this as a "chicken and egg problem".

Another challenge for churches is the workload for clergy and church leaders who seem hard-pressed to manage their pastoral duties as well as engage in community development work. A clear example of this was during the interview stage of this study. At every single one of our five focus groups, church leaders who had confirmed their attendance had to cancel due to a scheduling conflict or pastoral emergency. This demonstrates the challenge of mobilizing churches to engage in their community due to the lack of time staff can devote to work beyond their immediate pastoral responsibilities. This was echoed by many of our respondents, who voiced either frustration at the lack of church involvement in the community or a total lack of awareness about what the church was doing in or for the community. One politician believed that "religious institutions have done a terrible job in integrating in community life and being a partner with the different not only cities but organizations".

This highlights another issue that was repeatedly raised among our respondents – there is a serious lack of communication, collaboration, and awareness among community organizations about what churches are doing and vice versa. Some organizations even felt resistance from churches when trying to approach and engage with faith communities. This lack of collaboration limits the work of both groups as they continue trying to "go it alone" rather than pooling their resources and knowledge. Another negative side effect of this compartmentalization is that the poor experiences of some community workers with churches have become their defining experiences while the positive work of many churches is not being showcased as it should be. Some complained of being quoted exorbitant amounts of money to lodge a vulnerable person at a church temporarily. This is also combined with frequent skepticism and bias against religious organizations as community partners which can harm connections and relationships between different public and private groups and churches.

At every single one of our five focus groups, church leaders who had confirmed their attendance had to cancel due to a scheduling conflict or pastoral emergency. This demonstrates the challenge of mobilizing churches to engage in their community due to the lack of time staff can devote to work beyond their immediate pastoral responsibilities.

"

There is a serious lack of communication, collaboration, and awareness among community organizations about what churches are doing and vice versa.

"

6.4 **Needs**

In the face of declining numbers, overworked leaders, and difficulties connecting with community services and organizations, the Church is learning to adopt a fresh response to the needs inside and outside of its walls. Some churches noted how there is a need to adapt to the changing culture to reach people outside the typical Sunday morning service. One Church staff member expressed how the church needs to "envision new ways of connecting with people and sharing God's love. And it's not necessarily on Sundays". Many churches have already introduced various small groups and alternative services as part of their ministry. Churches could also benefit from delegating the responsibilities of community engagement from their pastoral leaders to other members with a passion for this ministry, thus alleviating the burden for clergy and improving church participation in events, projects, or community round tables where churches are currently not well represented.

Some community workers also expressed a desire to see a liaison between churches and community organizations to help facilitate collaboration between the two and "get the message across that the purpose [of community services] is to be beneficial to the people that are in the church". Within the church, it is also important for churches to raise awareness and advocate for the needs of the community and to mobilize their members towards serving in ways that both love their neighbours and multiply their witness. This can be accomplished by inviting community workers to share with Christian communities about their work. Additionally, raising awareness of services offered by community organizations can connect those within the churches to access the help that they may need.

In the face of declining numbers, overworked leaders, and difficulties connecting with community services and organizations, the Church needs to adopt a fresh response to the needs inside and outside of its walls.

"

Churches could also advertise and use their services and resources better to serve the community. Many respondents noted that they were unaware of what services were being offered by churches, suggesting a need for better communication about what churches are doing that others can benefit from or refer people to. Some respondents were also baffled by the number of churches sitting empty during the week when many community organizations were searching for affordable locations to house their operations. A local politician pointed out, "There are so many religious facilities that are empty right now. They could be doing something, you know, with an organization or organizations." In some cases, churches could offer the use of their buildings to community groups to help meet social needs.

Another important need is for comprehensive knowledge of what services are being offered by churches and community organizations. This can improve the ability of these groups to collaborate or refer people to appropriate resources according to their physical, emotional, and spiritual needs. Building relationships and communications with other organizations could create opportunities to support each other while allowing those outside the church to witness the positive impacts churches can have in the community.

Building relationships and communications with other organizations could create opportunities to support each other while allowing those outside the church to witness the positive impacts churches can have in the community.

7.0

Hurt, Heart, Hope

7.1 Heart: What gives the West Island strength?

The West Island is a community abounding with assets and resources which could take a long time to expound upon, but here we will focus on three main areas of strength: diversity, initiative, and resourcefulness.

The diversity of the West Island can be seen in both its demographic as well as its physical makeup. Many of our respondents expressed their appreciation for the diverse and multicultural nature of their community. The West Island has a multitude of various linguistic, ethnic, and religious communities who call the region their home. This adds to the beauty and cultural richness of the community, as well as its demographic and economic growth. But diversity also extends to the physical characteristics of the West Island, as the large region possesses a wide variety of distinct areas which increase the quality of life for its residents. From the large employment areas near Highway 40 to the parklands of Île-Bizard and l'Anse-à-l'Orme, to the historic villages of Sainte-Anne and Pointe-Claire or the dense urban centre of Fairview, to the vibrant and growing communities of Dorval and Pierrefonds or the quiet rural residences of Senneville, the West Island is a rich tapestry of many different spaces for life. The combination of diverse people and diverse places for them to live and thrive together is part of what gives the West Island strength and vitality.

The last time that anybody did a demographic study, they established [there] was like 19 different cultural communities in the West Island... We take care of patients from different countries, different religions. So I think that's very interesting. It makes us very rich.

– Health Worker

Another aspect of the West Island's strength is its culture of initiative and an entrepreneurial attitude. Perhaps as a result of the diversity of the community or due to the heritage of municipal independence of the region, the West Island has been host to an ever-growing number of individuals, organizations, neighbourhood groups, businesses, and cultural associations committed to and engaged in the flourishing of their community in different ways. Many of our respondents shared their view of the West Island as a community rich with many services and organizations pitching in and collaborating to fill the various needs they saw. One health worker told us, "[There's] over 70 not-for-profits in the West Island alone" and "[we] all work together, you know, for the well-being of the community." This entrepreneurial mindset can also be seen in the culture of volunteerism in the community which many organizations or churches saw as especially strong in the West Island. This culture lends itself to a greater sense of ownership and involvement in the community, especially for those committed people who have stepped up to serve in various volunteer or leadership roles.

There's over 70 not-for-profits in the West Island alone. We all work together, you know, for the well-being of the community. We refer clients, patients.

– Community Health Worker

Finally, the West Island has a vast amount of resources at its disposal to benefit its immediate community and beyond. These resources include, but are not limited to a plethora of community organizations, scores of churches, wealthy private donors, and committed volunteers. One community sector worker told us that "[most] of the shelters on the Island of Montreal are financed from donors on the West Island. So there's a lot of money on the West Island, but it doesn't stay on the West Island." A local politician spoke to us about the various fundraising initiatives that have taken place throughout the region to support different organizations and meet the needs of the community. This shows what a great impact generous donors in the West Island have had in funding various philanthropic projects while also showcasing the community's culture of initiative. The various organizations and volunteers are another great resource that

67

can have an outsized benefit for the region. With so many people focused on such a wide variety of needs and services, there is so much potential for these groups to multiply the flourishing of the West Island community as well as the wider Montreal region.

Most of the shelters on the Island of Montreal are financed from donors on the West Island. So there's a lot of money on the West Island, but it doesn't stay on the West Island.

– Community Worker

"

7.2 **Hurt:** What is holding the West Island back?

Many of the respondents in our study spoke to a variety of issues of communal hurt or limitations which they believed were hindering the flourishing of West Island. We have divided these concerns into three main categories: disconnection, inequality, and rivalry. While these divisions are somewhat artificial, they do serve as aids to synthesize the various issues raised by many respondents into a few cohesive themes.

The first area, that of disconnection, appeared repeatedly in our interviews. Many noted how, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic, people have been less engaged in church or community functions, organizations have been struggling to find volunteers, and many people are experiencing increasing isolation or struggles with mental health. This disconnection also extends to particular linguistic or ethnic groups, churches, and organizations that described compartmentalization that hindered positive collaboration. This can also manifest geographically since, though many services are operating in the West Island, these organizations are trying to reach a vast region which they are often spread too thin to properly service. Additionally, the layout of vast suburban neighbourhoods in the West Island is not especially conducive to community building, with single-family homes and driving-oriented neighbourhoods encouraging independent living while discouraging walkable communities with close access to amenities or communal spaces. This can create the conditions for problems like the ones our respondents raised such as isolated seniors, food deserts, higher costs of living, and disengaged or insular residents. Additionally, the problem of disconnection was also highlighted by churches and community organizations who noted the lack of collaboration between these groups that was hindering their impact in the community.

> *When [people are] down or they're suffering it's easier to just not. You know, it's hard to make that step to volunteer or to work. We all know what we should do, but it's hard to get there. And COVID made that even worse. Even among young adults, they know what they should do. But making that move is really hard.*
>
> *– Community Worker*

The next issue which was repeatedly identified in our research was that of inequality. Both in interviews and the census data, it became apparent that vast disparities exist between different areas of the West Island in terms of income, education, immigration, housing types, housing costs, and more. It was also noted by many respondents that a big limitation for their work in the community sector was the belief that the West Island is rich and doesn't need help. What many insisted on was the presence of significant pockets of poverty throughout the West Island that become hidden by the relative affluence of surrounding communities. Often, when statistics are represented, the wealth of certain quarters of the community can distort the average rates of poverty to the detriment of the less affluent residents, leaving them unseen, unheard, and under-resourced. This is an issue that many people working in the West Island have been trying to draw attention to for some time and is only becoming more challenging with the rapidly rising cost of living. In summary, the wealth-washing of these neighbourhoods and the unequal distribution of resources in and to the communities is putting vulnerable people in the West Island at a disadvantage compared with other low-income areas.

> *We have been, for lack of a better term, banging the drum so that the City of Montreal realizes that the West Island is in crisis. But slowly, we're being heard. And the momentum just has to continue so that it starts to make a difference and money starts to come or is allocated towards the West Island.*
>
> *– Community Worker*

The final area of hurt or limitation which emerged in this study was the sense of rivalry that underlies some of the challenges in the West Island. Historical alienation from the city of Montreal and the Province of Quebec, often with linguistic overtones, has created problems for the West Island community. The darker side of the independent spirit of the West Island is that it is either overlooked for outside help that could benefit the region or it is resistant to outside help if it jeopardizes municipal autonomy. This can manifest in an unwillingness to cooperate between demerged cities in the West Island or with the City of Montreal.

This rivalry mindset can also be seen among community organizations and churches which sometimes vie for seemingly limited resources and whose compartmentalization lends to an attitude of competition rather than collaboration. This was apparent in the repeated complaints from our respondents about the lack of communication and collaboration among different community groups and churches. This can also manifest among churches of different traditions that refuse to collaborate on community development on theological grounds.

Additionally, the diversity in the West Island can be both a strength and a challenge as the various linguistic, ethnic, or religious communities prefer to look inward rather than collaborate for the common good. One community worker familiar with the Cloverdale area said, "All the different ethnic groups stick to themselves. It's not really a melting pot." This tribal attitude can even boil over into open hostility, such as in the case of recent anti-semitic attacks on synagogues in the West Island. One Messianic Jewish Pastor expressed his deep concern over the rising hostility that characterized his community's

relationship with the rest of Montreal – even fellow Christian believers. The mindset of rivalry can be exacerbated by the disconnection that was compounded during the pandemic and the cultural polarization facilitated on social media. One police officer spoke bluntly about the power of new media to hinder the development of young people, saying that the cell phone "is the worst weapon in the world". While feelings of rivalry may not be the overt cause for every challenge facing the West Island, we noticed that this attitude can be traced through many issues in the region's history or facing the community today. This dynamic can make worse already difficult situations the community is facing by eroding trust and community cohesion.

While feelings of rivalry may not be the overt cause for challenges facing the West Island, we noticed that this attitude can be traced through many issues in the region's history or facing the community today.

7.3 Hope: What does the West Island need?

Our respondents expressed a desire to see their community change for the better and overcome its various challenges. Many identified key areas they would like to see addressed to facilitate this positive transformation in the West Island. These areas of need speak to the hopes of West Island residents and their vision for a flourishing community. This vision of the West Island was often characterized by hope for a community that is better connected, one that is more collaborative, and a community that is better at sharing its abundant resources.

The need for connection emerged repeatedly among the participants in this study, both the absence of it and the desire for it. Respondents highlighted the multifaceted nature of disconnection in the community which included declining church attendance and volunteerism, young people and seniors becoming increasingly isolated, the failure to integrate immigrants into the local community, and a lack of awareness about or between community service providers. Some people wisely noted how many of these issues are interrelated, and that resolving these problems could be more straightforward than it might appear. A local police officer spoke of his desire to see young people more engaged in volunteering, not only to support community services that rely on this but additionally as a means of reconnecting people through shared community engagement while simultaneously sensitizing and informing them about issues facing their community and the organizations trying to address them. A Christian campus minister also pointed out that young people have often been inundated with new and exciting events catered to them, but many are getting event oversaturation. What some highlighted was the importance of engaging in activities which are not only self-serving but are primarily aimed at serving others with the added benefit of making connections with others in the community. Respondents expressed similar desires to see new immigrants integrated into the community, focusing on their participation and engagement in volunteering and community events. Other community workers and churches also wanted to see churches hosting more gatherings and events in the community to foster connection and integrate the church into the wider community.

The challenge was also offered to individuals to take the initiative and start volunteering, to check in on their neighbours or call and visit someone lonely. The emphasis on gathering and volunteering to foster connection in the West Island is a clear actionable step for churches to initiate to positively contribute to the community's vision for flourishing.

Who's living around you...Are they isolated? Are they elderly? Maybe they need something if there's something that's happened like the ice storm that we had. It's not just one thing. It's citywide, it's churches, it's everyone trying to reconnect everywhere. It's a huge undertaking.
– Community Worker

Similar to connection, another need identified by West Islanders was greater collaboration between all levels of the community: individuals, churches, community organizations and the local government. Disappointment over the lack of collaboration and communication was particularly noticeable between community organizations and churches. The lack of connection discussed previously seemed to heighten this challenge as a lack of awareness and communication leads to more misunderstanding and distrust. This could be said of many groups in the community who compartmentalize or fail to initiate collaboration with other groups or fellow residents. Some community workers expressed their hope to see greater collaboration with churches, either by visiting churches to share about their work, understanding what churches are doing to recommend people to these programs, and increasing awareness of their services to get people the help they need. Some pastors had similar things to say, emphasizing their desire to be better connected to what is happening in the wider community, but often feeling too thinly stretched to respond to all the needs. Fortunately, community workers emphasized that they wanted to support and serve the church and recommend their people to church programs if they so wished. One community worker mentioned that "we need a liaison to get the message across that the purpose [of community services] is to be beneficial to the people that are in the church", encapsulating the spirit of generosity among these committed workers.

Fortunately, community workers emphasized that they wanted to support and serve the church and recommend their people to church programs if they so wished.

Another theme of hope that emerged in our study was for better sharing of resources on the West Island. This need extended to the sharing of knowledge and awareness of what each group in the community is doing, financial provision from private and public donors, the sharing of facilities and spaces for community needs, or giving of time and energy as a volunteer. Some community organizations were especially hopeful that the abundance of churches in the West Island could provide their property during the week to house the services they offer. A youth worker told us, "It's just unbelievable to think of [the number of churches] and the space and the resources and the possibilities and the potential...there's a lot that can be done there for sure." This same worker also noted how there was an opportunity to refer people between churches and community organizations, stating that "in five years of working for [my organization], I think I got maybe two or three references from churches". Many shared this eagerness to partner with local churches, despite some having poor experiences in the past. Fortunately, certain churches have already been pioneers in this area of sharing their spaces with community organizations, providing a model for others to follow.

Others in the community also called for private donors to fund the organizations providing services on the West Island, noting the inequality which masks the needs of the community. One worker spoke to us about the donations that were being sent outside of the West Island while very little was supporting the local community. Others were more concerned with increasing the participation of volunteers to help provide services to the community. One church staff member and lifelong volunteer said that they would continue to volunteer "but I'd be very happy if there was someone coming after me". This emphasized the need to build a culture of volunteerism in the next generation of the community. Overall, our respondents expressed a vision for the West Island that had a greater culture of collaboration and sharing resources between neighbours and among the various groups serving the community.

After the end of each interview or focus conducted in this study, we asked respondents to fill out a survey ranking community needs in the West Island from 1 to 14. These needs included Food Security, Affordable Housing, Integration of Immigrants, Programs for Youth and Children, Substance Abuse Treatment, Diversity Equity and Inclusion, Public Safety, Economic Growth, Mental Health, Homelessness, Support for Families, Infrastructure Improvements, Environment and Sustainability, and Education. This brief survey can give us an idea of the most urgent felt needs among people living, working, and serving in the West Island.

The highest priority needs (those ranked 1-4 by the most respondents) included **Mental Health, Affordable Housing, and Food Security** by a notable margin. The lowest priority needs identified by those surveyed (needs ranked 11-14 by most respondents) included **Public Safety, Environment and Sustainability, and Economic Growth**.

This survey, while only being a limited representation of the community, does suggest that Mental Health, Affordable Housing, and Food Security are widely held as the most pressing needs in the West Island, but also that people likely feel safe enough in their community to give such a low rating to Public Safety as a felt need. Additionally, less immediate and more elevated concerns such as the Environment or the Economy appear to have been relegated to low priority in favour of other, seemingly more urgent issues. Overall, there is a sense of clear and present danger about the Mental Health and Affordability crisis which emerges from the people we surveyed in this study.

Survey Responses: Highest and Lowest Priority Needs

1. Mental Health
2. Affordable Housing
3. Food Security

12. Economic Growth
13. Environment and Sustainability
14. Public Safety

8.0

Calls to Action:

What can Churches do?

Throughout this study, residents and community stakeholders provided concrete and actionable steps which the Church could take to respond to the needs in the West Island more effectively. The following appeals are an amalgamation of different suggestions provided by respondents who participated in this study. We have presented these calls to action using Christian principles and theological concepts to demonstrate how the traditions of Christianity provide a compelling framework for impactful community development. No church can be expected to accomplish all of these recommendations alone, but if every church in the West Island selected even one of these calls to action as an anchor cause, the potential for community impact would be enormous.

INTERCESSION

Churches can be actively involved in "standing in the gap" for their community, both in prayer and in practice. Christians should be known as the most outspoken advocates for the needy in their community, giving voice to the voiceless and speaking prophetically to power for the cause of justice and peace. Believers can also offer a more hopeful vision of the community and break down mindsets of hostility and rivalry through the framework of Christian reconciliation. To do this, Churches can:

- **Sensitize congregations and raise awareness in churches of the needs in the community.** This could involve inviting organizations to speak to the church and share what they do and how their church members can support them or get involved.

"Something we can do together is raise awareness. I was invited to a church a few months ago, but that's one church out of 80. I think if we can make connections and share about what we're doing for people at the end of mass or whatever, I really think there is a need to sensitize people so they understand that the people we are serving are someone's kid, someone's uncle, someone's friend, someone's brother. We have to develop that collective responsibility."

– Community Worker

- **Promote and advertise their programs and the programs of other services in the neighbourhood.** This can help connect people to the services they need and support the vulnerable in the community while increasing cooperation with other groups.

"There are a lot of organizations who want to help, there's lots of resources, but are people getting the information? The government also has a lot of services but too many people aren't aware of it."

– Local Pastor

- **Advocate for the needs of their neighbour to the surrounding community and different levels of government.** This means looking beyond the needs of the local church and thinking about what is best for the community at large. The church should be the loudest when advocating for the needs of the poor and vulnerable.

"But at the bare minimum, we need to build awareness and we need networks like yourself and the police and the Table speaking out and saying, hey, this is an issue."

– Community Worker

- **Be consistent with intercessory prayer for the hurts and needs of their community giving special attention to themes of despair and hope, rivalry and reconciliation.** Bringing the most lamentable realities to God in prayer is the first step in receiving a redemptive and hopeful vision of one's community from Him.

INCARNATION

Churches are called to be deeply involved at all levels of community life, building relationships and connections among people in the neighbourhood and reflecting the incarnational ministry of Jesus. Being present with others in the community from a posture of service improves the Church's visibility and influence while expanding opportunities to witness the love of Jesus to our neighbour. This also serves to further erode isolation, conflict, and rivalry in the community by building connections using the practice of enemy love. To be more Incarnational churches can:

- **Be present at meetings, round tables, and community events and maintain open communication with community partners.**

"[We need] people to be part of the boards of community organizations and know that their word is taken into account and that they have a weight in what they are saying, what they are proposing."

– Community Worker

- **Host community gatherings to help reconnect people and integrate the church into the local community.** These gatherings can be oriented towards connecting with people in the community, and not necessarily just for church members on Sunday mornings. Churches can also create a culture of connection and break isolation by emphasizing how being engaged in one's community is life-giving and an opportunity to witness the love of Christ to their neighbour.

"Some of the things that the churches could do is reaching into the community and hosting events that maybe aren't church on Sunday."

– Community Worker

- **Mobilize their congregations to volunteer and build a culture of volunteerism.** The need for volunteers is increasing and so is the need for connection. Volunteering can provide a great space for people to become aware of needs in the community, and feel empowered to contribute, all while building connections with others in the process.

"Part of the solution could be developing a culture of volunteering...That's something in Quebec, especially in the church culture, we could be doing to encourage young people to participate and get involved."

– Community Worker

- **Delegate people to manage community development work to alleviate the burden on clergy and increase engagement.** Clergy are often busy enough with their pastoral responsibilities, and having dedicated lay people to oversee community engagement could be an excellent way of releasing new leaders and increasing Church participation in the community.

"We need to recreate the links between the community organizations and the Church because we have so much in common in the way we see the world and want to have a positive effect on it."

– Community Worker

GENEROSITY

Christianity has a rich theology of generosity, and Christians are called to be exemplars of radical generosity, using their resources to love their neighbour and bless their community. By treating their resources as a gift from God, they can invest their time and resources into Kingdom work as faithful stewards of the treasure God entrusts to them. This can also serve as a witness to the upside-down kingdom of God in the face of rising inequality and costs of living in Canada. To practice generosity, churches can:

- **Provide their buildings or spaces to host or house community organizations.** A spirit of generosity also demands that we are offering these spaces as an act of charity, not to leverage more profits.

"There's a lot of churches around that are empty, you know...And they could be holding our [food bank]."

– Community Worker

- **Foster teachings and practices of generosity in support of services in their community, both inside and outside of the church.** Churches have long been major donors in community development, and the continued support of churches will be critical in meeting the growing needs in the West Island.

"So in terms of the West Island Network, you guys are pretty good at providing us with food drives throughout the year. And the summer is a key time where the churches do take care of us."

– Community Worker

- **Encourage their members to use their unique skills to serve the church and other community organizations.** Different members of churches have unique skills, knowledge, or language abilities which could be a huge benefit for not-for-profit groups. This represents a great opportunity to bless the community by mobilizing each congregant into uniquely fulfilling leadership and service.

"Maybe for some churches it's easier to fundraise, for some it's easier to cook food, for some it's easier to collect clothes, and toques, and mittens. But I think that's it, knowing what you are able to provide and what our needs are is already the first step in this discussion."

– Community Worker

9.0

Conclusion

As Christians doing community development it is important to ask – what is the purpose of learning about our community? Why is it imperative that churches perform rigorous research and seek to understand the context of the community in which they serve? The answer to this question may be found in the words of a lawyer to Jesus in Luke 10:29 who asked, "Who is my neighbour?" This question was posed to seek justification for the prevailing attitudes of conditional neighbour-love that perpetuated entrenched divisions between 'us' and the 'them.' But the response Jesus gives to this question is astonishing. The parable of the Good Samaritan shows that the least expected and most excluded person – our enemy – is our neighbour whom God has called us to love as ourselves. This radical call to love across battle lines stands as the Church's most powerful instrument for community transformation. It has been, and will always be, a singular force in our world with the capacity to interrupt cycles of oppression, rivalry, and violence and provide a path to peace, reconciliation, and flourishing communities.

As one of our respondents noted there is a "crying need" in the West Island. Not only physical needs such as housing, volunteers, or more community services, but also spiritual needs such as pastoral care, peacemaking, and a more hopeful vision for the community. These are needs that the Church is uniquely equipped to offer their community. But loving our neighbour requires that we look beyond the four walls of the Church into our neighbourhood from Monday to Friday. It would serve to remember the words of William Temple, the Archbishop of Canterbury, who said that, "The Church is the one institution that exists primarily for its non-members." In some cases, but not all, the Church has been caught sitting on the sidelines while good Samaritans are busily working for the good of the community. It seems high time that we look to those people in our community who are displaying acts of mercy towards the hurting and broken and, in the words of Christ, "go, and do likewise".

The West Island is also undergoing a period of profound change. The significant challenges facing this community, from large demographic shifts to isolation and mental health crises or competing visions of development in the community, require fresh responses from the Church. Now more than ever we must again ask the question: "Who is my neighbour?" This question is no longer posed with a heart for justifying our prejudices, but with eager expectation of God's revealed heart for our community and his strategy for loving the least, the last, and the lost. For Christians, the purpose of seeking a depth of understanding about our communities is to provide the context we need to listen to and be guided by the Holy Spirit into practical acts of neighbour-love in our community. Just as Jesus spoke to the lawyer in Luke about a specific context within which he could practice love of neighbour in first-century Judea, we believe that God has something to say about loving our neighbour today in the West Island of Montreal. The question for the Church and each one of us is – will we listen?
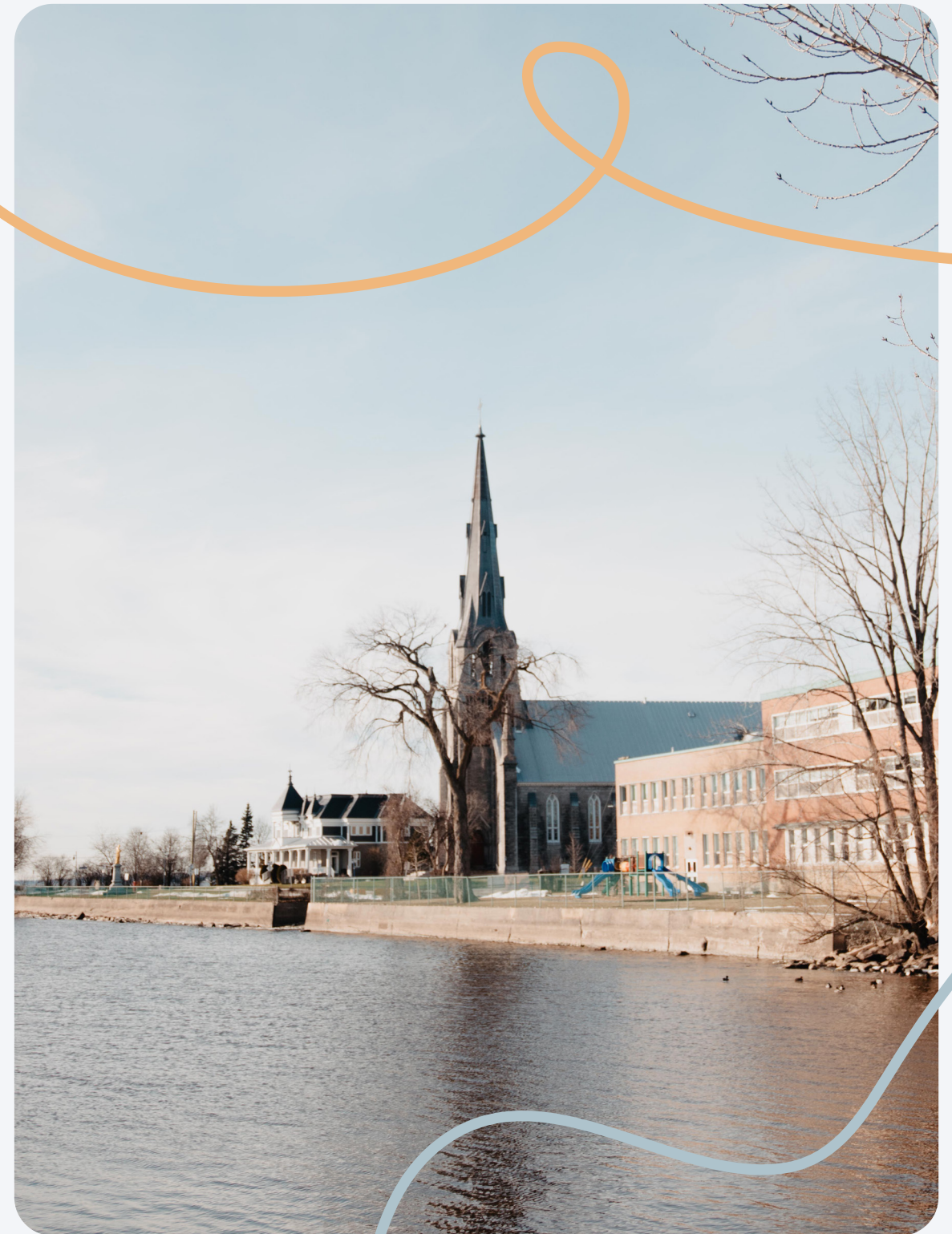
Appendix

Access the appendix by scanning this QR code or go to *www.direction.ca/win-appendix*