

An Exegetical Neighborhood Walk

by Simon Carey Holt

The purpose of this exercise is to see your neighborhood in its detail and to respond to what you see both sensitively and critically. It's not one you can rush.

Before you go, take some time to think about how you define your neighborhood and how it's physically laid out. Draw yourself a map, including your own home, the basic street patterns, and any landmarks, shops, commercial or community buildings, schools or parks. Be sure to include those boundary markers or natural borders that give your neighborhood definition. For some, the neighborhood will be larger than for others. It's a very personal thing; no one else can define it for you. The only criteria are that it includes where you live and is walkable. Once you've got a rough idea in mind of what area to include, set aside 30 minutes to 1 hour of uninterrupted time, grab a notebook and pen and head out. Here's a list of questions to help you as you go:

1. As you stand just outside your house or apartment—by the front gate or on the sidewalk—what do you see as you look in each direction? What do you hear or sense? What activity do you notice?
2. As you walk the neighborhood, what do you notice? Who do you see?
3. How would you characterize the people you see? What is their age, race, and gender? What might be their cultural background?
4. What might be the attitudes of those you walk by, where might they spend time, what might they do for fun, what might be the concerns they have, what might be their religious or spiritual tendencies?
5. If you feel led or have the opportunity, engage someone naturally and ask these questions.
6. For the people you pass, what might be some barriers or obstacles for these people to engage faith?
7. What public spaces are provided for children, teenagers, or adults? Are they being used? If so, in what ways?
8. If there is a local park, what do you notice about it? Does it feel like an inviting place? Who is there? How is it used?
9. Do you pass any churches or religious buildings? What does their design or appearance communicate to you? Are they heavily attended, places of life, or historical landmarks?
10. What kinds of commercial buildings are there? Walk around a supermarket or local store and identify who makes up the clientele?

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11. If your neighborhood includes a shopping area, is there provision made for people to sit, relax, or relate?

12. Are there places in your neighborhood that you wouldn't go? Why?

13. Where are the places of life, hope, beauty or community in this neighborhood?

14. What evidence of struggle, despair, neglect and alienation do you see?

15. What sense of connection do you feel to your neighborhood as you walk through it?

16. In what ways do you sense God's presence where you live?

An exercise from Simon Carey Holt, *God Next Door: Spirituality and Mission in the Neighborhood*. Brunswick: Acorn Press, 2007, 103-104.

Additionally,

- Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you as you go
- Remain in a Spirit of prayer as you walk
- Listen for what might be good news for the people in your neighborhood