

# City House Project

Program evaluation of City House's goals and intended outcomes

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## City House Project: Overview

This project investigated six targeted areas to explore the extent to which City House's stated goals and outcomes are being met as well as how to improve key aspects of the City House program, such as student recruitment.

Methods for assessment included two surveys, given to the current group of students living in City House during the academic year 2013-2014. Students took the first survey near the start of the Fall term and complete the second survey at the end of the spring term. Interviews were conducted with three groups: City House neighbors, former City House students, and current City House students. Seven neighbors were interviewed, four former students, and seven current students. A survey was given out and completed by 184 members of the Geneva community. Finally, analyses of City House student journals were completed. Questions regarding City House curricula and activities were addressed via communications with the City House Director.

# Student Recruitment

The following questions guided analyses for student recruitment:

- What is City House's reputation on Geneva's campus?
- Why don't more students apply to City House?
- How do the goals and values of City House pertaining to civic engagement align with goals and values in the Geneva community?
- What reasons do students have for dropping out of the interview process?

## City House's Reputation at Geneva

Most (92%) of Geneva faculty, staff, and students who completed the digital survey to the Geneva community were at least somewhat familiar with City House prior to taking the survey. Views toward City House were generally favorable, with 77% stating that they had a positive or very positive opinion of City House. Also, most (75%) of respondents felt that City House's goals (which were stated on the survey) aligned "very well" with Geneva's.

Most respondents wrote statements indicating their opinions of City House. The following are respondent statements reflecting the types of comments given.

- I think it's a fantastic program! It really does a service both to the community and, mostly, to the students involved.
- I think it's a great opportunity to get involved with the city of Beaver Falls, but it's also not that accessible to students with science majors.

- Seems to be a good thing. Its neighbors speak well of it, and its residents are clearly spiritual Christians and dedicated to the project.
- I like what I hear. I think it encourages students to learn to serve in a setting where practical service meshes with teaching about service.
- Dynamic learning community with attention to a wide range of social, particularly small-urban, issues. I think it still has some identity-building work to do in the community and on campus.
- Initially I was skeptical, especially about students getting credit for living and learning there; but I have been much more favorably impressed over time with the kinds of relationships that are built, and frankly with Wendy herself as the director.
- Good idea, great location—the purpose and daily life is not communicated clearly to student body and fac/staff unless you have a direct connection with someone involved.
- I like what I've seen of it and I'm definitely thinking of applying to live there either next year or the year after. I love the community, the house, and the atmosphere. It seems like a great place to live in community with good Christian friends.

Of the 161 respondents who wrote in statements of their opinion of the house, 157 indicated a positive view of the house. Of the four who did not, two said that they did not have enough information available and the other two wrote in statements about another topic (such as conflating City House with School House).

#### **Alignment of City House and Geneva Goals and Values**

Of the 29 individuals who provided additional comments on this point, nearly all (that is, all comments that could be interpreted) indicated that City House exemplifies the goals of Biblical Community, Neighborhood Engagement, Hospitality, Application of Christian Principles to Everyday Life, and Community Living & Responsibility to a greater

extent than does Geneva. Some commented that they wished Geneva exemplified these goals. For example, respondents stated:

- Geneva could learn from City House.
- I believe you go above and beyond Geneva's mission.
- Geneva's goals could be better aligned with the City House goals of Neighborhood engagement and Hospitality.
- I wish the college as a whole embraced these goals. I think City House can be a model for the college.

However, one commenter noted that City House was missing some key goals.

- I think these goals do align with Geneva's mission, but I think some key goals are missing. Those goals would be those of evangelism in the community and a general Kingdom-oriented mindset. City House may be a great way to engage the community as merely a "good citizen," but not necessarily as a good servant of the King.

City House students offered similar comments on the alignment of City House and Geneva goals.

- Aligns with Geneva's mission and actually lives out Geneva's goals...can add legitimacy to Geneva and its mission.
- City House is much more based on actions than internal. Geneva focuses on Bible study and worldview. City House is much more on what does that look like in everyday activities in a way that Geneva is missing. City House is weak on fostering healthy spirituality in people.
- City House over-attains what Geneva is striving toward. With Geneva, there could be so much more.

Thus, City House students and Geneva respondents were remarkably in-line with each other, with most stating that City House lives out the mission that Geneva aspires to in the abstract. However, a few individuals noted that overall spirituality is perhaps more cultivated by the college compared to City House.

### **Comparison of City House Students and Geneva Community**

On two separate surveys, City House students and members of the Geneva community were given opportunities to indicate their views of the connection between their faith and community engagement. These two groups answered similarly on most questions, such as on the importance of Christians engaging in volunteer activities and being involved in their communities,

However, current City House students, answering a survey within a month of entering City House, were more likely than the Geneva community at-large to indicate that they “strongly agree” with the following statements: 1) Engagement with my community is an important way to live out my Christian beliefs; 2) Engagement with my community goes hand-in-hand with my personal faith.

Indeed, on my survey questions connecting community engagement and faith, higher proportions of current City House students indicated “strongly agree” at the point of entry into City House, compared to the Geneva community at-large. Still, most respondents on the survey to the Geneva community indicated “agree” or “strongly agree” to most questions about community engagement and faith. From this data, it appears that the current cohort of City House students, at least, holds slightly stronger

views about the connection between community engagement and faith prior to significant time spent in City House versus the Geneva community at-large. However, since some of these students also participated in the survey given to the Geneva community and represent a very small sample, it is impossible to make definitive comparisons between the two groups. In addition, as discussed in the **Student Experience** section of this report, current City House student scores at the start of the year may be inflated, for a variety of reasons.

### **Students Applying to City House**

A little over half (57.3%) of Geneva undergraduates knew that City House students have saved \$1,400 per semester compared to students living on campus. About 80% of the undergraduates said, however, that they were not interested in applying to City House. The primary reasons (students were permitted to pick multiple options from the choices) for this choice were:

1. Concerned about adding to school/work load (64%)
2. Too busy to participate (53%)
3. Prefer to live in on-campus housing (48%)

Also, a sizeable number (25% of those indicating a specific reason) stated that they couldn't participate because they were graduating seniors. Students indicating what would make them more likely to apply to City House varied greatly in responses given.

The top answers were:



1. I want to learn to interact with neighbors (52.2%)
2. I think that it would help me to be a more responsible and hospitable person (51.1%)
3. I want to be able to live out my faith in the Beaver Falls community (48.9%)
4. I think it would help me to grow in my faith (47.8%)

Only 5.2% of respondents had applied to City House and stopped the application.

Those explaining their rationale stated, “I was told it was filled already by more applicable people,” “thought it was a bad idea,” “feelings of apprehension,” and “I could not fit the extra obligations of the house into my credit schedule and campus responsibilities.”

Faculty, staff, and graduate students completing the survey were split on whether or not they had recommended that undergraduates apply to City House. Fifty-three percent had not made a recommendation, and 47% had. Interestingly, 84.5% said that they would now be likely to recommend City House to students in the future.

Positive comments on why they had recommended City House or would in the future included:

- For students who do not want to live on campus or are passionate about incarnational ministry, I would highly recommend City House.

- City House provides a great learning opportunity for students and provides an experience that [is] holistic and a healthy vision of community living in a particular place.
- I don't like that we've gotten caught in the "Geneva Bubble," ignoring the immediate community next door to the college. And this type of getting involved in community is something Christians have been called to.

Some of the respondents who had not recommended City House to undergraduates in the past noted the following barriers:

- Not on my radar to do so, and also not sure where to send them—is there a website with info?
- I haven't had students who I thought would particularly be a good fit for it.
- I am not familiar enough with it to recommend it.
- I just never thought about it.

Based on the generally positive statements from the Geneva community overall and figures indicating that half of Geneva faculty/staff respondents had already recommended students to City House, it seems likely that greater familiarity with City House would prompt other Geneva staff and faculty may do so in the future. Given that interest in recommending City House in the future jumped to nearly 85% after completing the survey, this may be an important consideration for student recruitment.

## Student Recruitment

City House students and neighbors had their own views of the types of students who should be recruited to City House. Some of the neighbors were hoping for a more “outgoing” crop of students; one neighbor recommended that a mix of shy and outgoing students be recruited so that the outgoing students can encourage the others to interact more in the community. One neighbor felt that the typical City House student was a “seriously religious type” and wondered, partly-facetiously, whether “not just the nerds” could be selected for the house. One City House student agreed, saying, “City House is welcoming for people who aren’t connected on campus. Those who do [come] are outsiders. This may dissuade others from coming.”

City House students had very specific qualities that they recommended be considered in future student recruitment efforts: open-mindedness, flexibility, good mental health, well-informed about City House, willingness to work in a community, willingness to get to know others and work with others, someone who wants to know Beaver Falls, and emotional maturity. Some students emphasized that if a student’s main rationale for applying is to live off campus, this could be a problem in terms of the student’s motivation to fully participate in City House.

Both neighbors and students brainstormed specific ideas for student recruitment. Some in both groups wondered how to get more student athletes to apply to City House (both groups recommended that this be a key group to target for recruiting). One

recommendation was to invite groups of students from specific teams or campus activities (i.e. tennis team) to the house for dinner. Many City House students indicated that speaking with a current or prior City House student or the director was crucial in encouraging them to apply to City House.

Summarizing feedback from all groups (City House students, neighbors, and Geneva community members), the following recommendations were made for student recruitment:

- Continue to invite faculty in the social sciences to City House for visits, guest speaker, and dinners. Expand beyond sociology to human services and psychology. Ask for their assistance in talking about City House more overtly and recommending students. See whether faculty can bring their classes over to City House for dinner or a visit.
- Connect with the residence halls. Invite RAs and RDs to visit City House and then go back with more information to their residents. Have City House students and personnel visit the residence halls for informational sessions.
- Join up with existing Geneva events to enhance visibility. One Geneva community member noted, "Have the City House do things on campus and ask for people FROM campus (who are stuck here by policy) to go out and do things WITH you. You are all another mini community that Geneva does not

really notice because Geneva is in a bubble...” Some event ideas: have City House students speak about their experiences; make t-shirts for City House students to wear to campus events and activities.

- City House students recommended that City House connect with the Center for Faith and Practice and seemed excited about this potential connection.
- Show a video of City House on youtube. Have City House students/personnel lead a chapel session and talk about personal and community impact when presenting the video in chapel.
- Connect with campus offices and periodicals that promote activities: Geneva Happening, The Cabinet, press releases.

In summary, City House students, neighbors, and Geneva community members seemed very interested in brainstorming ideas to promote City House and increase the pool of students who apply to City House.

## **Summary: Student Recruitment**

It is likely that respondents on the survey given to the Geneva community were more likely to be favorably disposed to City House versus individuals who did not take the time to complete the survey. In addition, City House students (both current and

former) also participated in this survey. Still, responses were overwhelmingly positive in terms of Geneva student, faculty, and staff views of City House, approval of City House's goals, interest in seeing larger numbers of students apply, and interest in brainstorming ideas for the future success of City House.

One of the greatest barriers to these individuals promoting City House and recommending it was lack of knowledge. Many of the suggestions for student recruitment would have the additional benefit of promoting familiarity of City House campus-wide, which would in turn most likely funnel more students to City House. Given recommendations to encourage more Geneva professors to recommend City House to their students, it may be worth pursuing whether chairs in various disciplines (i.e. human services, education) would count City House coursework toward credits within a different major, such as via a practicum or independent study in a major other than sociology.

Regarding barriers to students applying to City House, a disconnect between approving the goals of City House and the logistics of participating is apparent. Despite having positive views of City House, most students stated that they would not apply. It is interesting to note that the workload was the primary concern, over and above transportation and distance issues. This factor aligns with some reasons stated for students dropping out of the application process. Clarifying and possibly rethinking student workload in City House, and incorporating these clarifications into the overall promotion of City House may be key in eliciting more student applications.

Finally, City House students and neighbors made specific recommendations for recruiting “outgoing” students and students active in other groups, such as athletics. Their rationale was that such recruitment would aid City House’s mission of engagement in the community as well as break down barriers that may prevent some students from applying (that is, if City House is perceived as applying to only a certain type of student). However, other City House students offered what was perhaps a more nuanced view, indicating that it’s not personality-type that matters but simply a willingness to engage with individuals within the community and City House. A shyer individual, then, would need to commit to working on self-growth throughout the year and being open to go outside his/her comfort zone in perhaps an even greater way than his/her peers.

Regarding the connecting with student athletes and other groups, this recommendation may or may not be feasible. However, the recommendation to go beyond inviting guest speakers and friends to visit City House and move toward inviting small groups of people with commonalities is one that may be feasible and may help with promoting City House’s visibility. In addition, members in the Geneva community seemed interested in City House students and personnel talking about City House on campus, such as via chapel services or connecting with RDs, so that greater interest could arise and then interested individuals may be more open to applying. Since such promotional activities take time and resources, it may be useful to think of whether another person’s role (such as the House Mentor of City House or an individual in the Center for Faith and Practice) could devote time and attention to these initiatives.

# Student Experience

The following questions guided analyses regarding student experiences within City House.

- What student (and other) characteristics predict who does and does not get a lot out of living in City House?
- Are students meeting City House's outcomes?
- How does the student perception of the integration of civic engagement and their Christian faith change over time?
- What types of student screenings would be helpful for aiding student composition of City House?

## Student Characteristics

The **Student Recruitment** section of this report presents qualities that former and current City House students felt were most beneficial in a City House student.

Nearly all of the students interviewed stated that if it were feasible, they would participate in City House again, knowing what they know now and have experienced.

Nearly all had extremely positive statements about City House. For example, the following are student statements in response to the question, "Did City House meet expectations?"

- Expectations were shot-out-of-the-water. Exceeded everything I couldn't have imagined. Other times, it was all the things I didn't want [stated in reference to the difficulties of living closely with others]!



- It wasn't at all what I envisioned, but I learned differently. It was probably what I needed, what God would have me learn about community and getting along...I thought we'd be a close-knit community—it wasn't that. But we learned about getting along.
- They were definitely met. In some ways exceeded. I got to know people better than I thought I would. They're some of my best friends.

Of the 11 students interviewed (current and former), only two indicated overall negative experiences. On the survey to the Geneva community, one former City House student indicated a mixed experience with the house, with positive experiences regarding engagement in Beaver Falls and negative experiences with conflict resolution within City House. Of the two interviewed students who indicated overall negative experiences, both indicated disappointment with what they perceived as a lack of spiritual emphasis within the house. They indicated that they felt like outsiders within the house and didn't seem to connect with others.

Most of the other students interviewed indicated that they didn't drastically change in their views regarding community engagement because they came into the house already on-board with this concept. They indicated that City House helped to strengthen what they already believed, and that the experience provided them with specific practices to help them engage in similar ways in the future. A few City House students seemed to have entered the house fairly blind and unaware of their own motivation in applying and what to expect; these students indicated overall positive, eye-opening experiences. However, many of these students had some difficulty with

articulating how they would implement what they had learned in City House in the future and what the precise impact was on them.

### **Students and City House Outcomes**

A survey given to current City House students at the start and close of their year in City House assessed change over time in student views of the importance of community engagement, the connection between community engagement and their faith, and their views of Christian community. Eight students completed both the pre- and post-surveys.

Table 1 displays means and standard deviations for pre- and post-test scores on various community engagement questions. As shown in the table, student averages slightly decreased from the start to the end of the academic year on their views of the importance of building relationships with neighbors and understanding the history, demographics, assets, and challenges of the community in which they live. However, student averages on these dimensions started very high, and the decrease was not statistically significant.

Student averages increased across the year on their views of the importance of living in a diverse neighborhood and interacting with people with different beliefs or who are from a different social background. While these increases were not statistically significant, gains in these areas are discernible. In September, two of the eight students indicated that living in a diverse neighborhood was either “somewhat unimportant” or

Table 1

*Means and Standard Deviations for Community Engagement Questions*

Survey Question	Baseline	SD	Follow-up	SD
Building relationships with neighbors	4.88	0.35	4.50	0.53
Understanding history, demographics, assets, and challenges of the community	4.88	0.35	4.50	0.53
Living in a diverse neighborhood	4.13	1.13	4.62	0.52
Interacting with people with different beliefs	4.50	0.76	5.00	0.00
Interacting with people from a different social background	4.63	0.52	5.00	0.00

Note: Data reflect Baseline and Follow-up means for a 5-point Likert measure asking students to rank the importance of these activities (1= Not at all important; 5= Very Important).

“neither important nor unimportant.” Combined with other students in September who were already on-board with the importance of this issue, scores at the start of the year were highly variable on this measure. By May, *all eight* students indicated that living in a diverse neighborhood was either “somewhat” or “very important.” While averages on

the importance of interacting with people with different beliefs or who come from a different social background began somewhat high in September, improvement occurred such that all eight students indicated that these aspects were “very important” by the end of their year in City House. While it is likely that a ceiling effect is observable here, the perfect alignment of students on these two questions does indicate improvement across the year.

Regarding volunteer activities, no differences were observable from the start of the year to the end on the frequency of volunteering except for a statistically significant decrease in volunteer activities with civic and community organizations. While one City House student helpfully wrote in that they were thinking about their volunteer work in the soup kitchen when answering this item, others perhaps were not. Frequency of volunteer activity in this area decreased across the year,  $t = 2.38$  ( $df = 7$ ),  $p = .05$ . This is likely a result of students not knowing where to categorize their volunteer activities and perhaps forgetting that volunteer work with the soup kitchen counted.

Table 2 displays means and standard deviations for questions pertaining to frequency of engaging with neighbors in specific activities. Students reported engaging in most of these activities slightly more often by May versus September, except for having conversations with neighbors that broadened their views on a particular topic. Student learning and talking about features of their neighborhood and community increased across the year; this difference was statistically significant,  $t = -2.37$  ( $df = 7$ ),  $p = .05$ . Student answers on this dimension were highly variable at the start of the year. By

Table 2

*Means and Standard Deviations for Frequency of Community Engagement*

Survey Question	Baseline	SD	Follow-up	SD
Engaged in conversations with neighbors	3.00	0.76	3.25	0.46
Learned & talked about neighborhood	2.63	1.06	3.62	0.52
Engaged in social activities with neighbors	2.63	0.93	3.25	0.89
Conversation with neighbor broadened one's views	2.50	0.93	2.38	1.06

Note: Data reflect Baseline and Follow-up means and standard deviations for a 4-point Likert measure asking students to rank the frequency of these activities (1= Never, 2= Rarely, 3= Occasionally, 4= Frequently).

the end of the year, students who had not indicated that they had learned and talked about their neighborhoods and communities in this way in the past increased these activities, while those who already had stayed consistently high in their scores.

Unexpectedly, student ranking on most dimensions connecting community engagement and personal faith decreased somewhat (although nonsignificantly) from the start to the end of the academic year. Table 3 displays these means and standard deviations. Student responses on whether engaging with communities goes hand-in-hand with their faith stayed consistently high from September to May. General and slight decreases may or may not be meaningful and can be explained in a number of ways, including student fatigue at the close of the year. It may also be a result of high

Table 3

*Means and Standard Deviations for Importance of Connecting Community Engagement & Faith*

Survey Question	Baseline	SD	Follow-up	SD
It is important for Christians to volunteer	4.00	1.07	3.63	1.30
It is important for Christians to be involved in their communities	4.75	0.46	4.50	0.53
Engagement with my community is an important way to live out Christian beliefs	4.63	0.52	4.50	0.74
Engagement with my community goes and-in-hand with my personal faith	4.38	0.52	4.38	0.52
Connecting in authentic ways with my Christian peers is important to me	4.86	0.38	4.57	0.78
Letting myself be accountable to a Christian peer is a key way to become spiritually mature	4.62	0.52	4.25	0.89
Connecting in authentic ways with Christian peers helps me to become emotionally mature	4.75	0.46	4.38	0.92
Connecting with other Christians helps me to draw closer to Christ	4.75	0.46	4.63	0.74

Note: Data reflect Baseline and Follow-up means and standard deviations for a 5-point Likert measure assessing agreement with these statements (1= Strongly Disagree, 5= Strongly Agree).

and naïve expectations at the start of the year inflating the baseline scores with the follow-up scores reflecting more realistic and accurate assessments that are still high. Student responses from the interviews seem to support this view; this information is presented in the next three sections of this report. Finally, it may be that this cohort of students reflects an anomaly from typical patterns.

The students' own self-assessments of how they changed as a result of participating in City House may be informative in further illuminating what was gained during the year.

- I walk away from City House a very different person—I see in myself the deep roots of selfishness, and I learned this year that the only loving I am good at is the loving that comes naturally with liking. It is deeply difficult to love people who are different from me. I walk away having had a year of practice, many failures, and a few hopeful triumphs.
- I am far bolder, braver and more confident as a person. I am more willing to engage with people I don't know well and who seem very different from me and to approach acquaintances or introduce myself to strangers. I have learned how to love difficult people better. I have become far more deeply committed to place generally and this place specifically. I have learned the power of prayer in community.
- I have altered some of my consumeristic habits. Instead of buying things at a chain store, I'll go to a local nick-nack [sic] store to get someone a gift or buy as much of the food that we can at the local grocery store instead of Wal-mart. I also have recognized the need for living in a deep community and would like to be involved in that sort of atmosphere as long as I can and am growing a deeper understanding that I need to place and ground myself at some point to an area so that it [sic] build familiarity and connectedness to that area.

- I understand the importance of having Christian community and have learned a whole entire different meaning to the word family and could never be thankful enough. It has given me hope when I thought that there was very little hope in this world and I feel like I have been so blessed.

Such statements may reflect that qualitative measures may be more informative in regard to student learning on complex outcomes versus quantitative measures due to the need to carefully draw out answers from end-of-the-year, fatigued undergraduates!

### **Student Screenings**

The **Student Recruitment** section of this report presents some recommendations for student composition of City House. Also, data pertaining to student experiences within the house suggest additional recommendations.

Student dissatisfaction with City House seems to focus primarily on conflict within the house as well as a perceived lack of emphasis on spirituality. City House may want to consider whether to more carefully discuss what City House is *not* in addition to what it is when meeting with students to determine fit with the house. Student response to this frank discussion may then be incorporated into the screening process. As discussed in the next two sections of this report, more intentionality regarding communal prayer in particular might result in better engagement of some students within the house as well as more overall acceptance by other Geneva students.

Conflict resolution (also discussed further in the **Impact of Activities** section) seems to be a concern for many students in City House. While mental health screenings were not feasible as part of this project, it is certainly worth considering whether a



standardized screening instrument could be used to assess personality type, personal approaches to conflict, and overall sociability for purposes of applicant screening.

Faculty in the counseling program might be helpful as consultants in this issue.

## Summary: Student Experience

Overall, City House students report growing in ways that they hadn't anticipated during their time in City House. Quantitative and qualitative data seem to suggest that most students came in endorsing the ideology of City House but perhaps had little experience to help them truly understand the realities of what they would encounter.

The challenges of relating to others in community and the realities of interacting with neighbors regularly may have resulted in students experiencing a disconnect between their own behaviors and their beliefs. This is not necessarily an area of concern; as presented in the Christian Community section of this report, this may be a necessary part of student growth in City House.

Future sections to this report incorporate more information obtained from interviews of former City House students who have had an opportunity to reflect on what they learned from City House. While quantitative data does not present striking support for improvement across the year in key targeted areas, qualitative data strongly indicates that students were challenged in significant ways by participating in City

House. The four quotes provided in this section (which were the most detailed comments given by current City House students who completed pre- and post-survey assessments) indicate growth consistent with City House goals.

# Impact of Activities

Guiding question:

- What specific activities make the greatest impact on students in City House?

## **Favorite Activities/Aspects of City House**

Prior and current City House students zeroed in on three main activities/aspects of City House that were their favorites: dinners and eating together, fellowship with house members, and living in Beaver Falls. Regarding what they enjoyed about having dinner together, students said the following:

- Some of the greatest theological conversations were around the kitchen.
- People were intrigued by City House. We'd have a bunch of people coming down for dinners, having neighbors come. Helpful for getting to know people. Knowing we formed connections with them.
- We cooked a meal for each other every day of the week. Extending that to everyone---we were very intentional. We cooked for a lot of people! We extended our table to others.

Many students spoke about how they enjoyed hanging out with other City House students, getting to know a diverse group of students, and getting to experience community within the house.

- Experiencing what a community looked like when it was trying to be intentional. I was really searching for that...This was probably one of the greatest growing experiences for me—making friends, fighting, yes, but getting along.
- Feels like a family—a weird, dysfunctional family! I'm more excited about coming home [to City House] than being on campus.
- Love the community here. It's really incredible. Built a lot of relationships. I don't want to leave. It's like a family. Everything falls in place around that.
- I experienced faith-based growth. I've been able to learn about the people I live with and myself more than I thought I would.

Finally, regarding enjoying living in Beaver Falls, some students stated that they came to love the walk to campus. It became a time to see and think about the city as well as a time to connect with classmates who walked with them. For others, living in Beaver Falls solidified what some termed a “justice-focus” that they already had.

Students described many other favorite activities that didn't make the top three but were still mentioned by multiple students. The guest speakers were a favorite aspect of City House, and students particularly liked it when the speakers stayed for dinner. Many students really enjoyed the book studies, although there was mixed opinion here, as will be later discussed. One student summarized the mixed feelings, saying, “The book studies were really good. A lot of the time I didn't like the books we had to read, but I liked hearing the other points of view because everyone else liked it!” Students enjoyed the retreats and specifically like the opportunity to play games and do devotions with one another. Recent groups of students enjoyed visiting other living-

learning communities and learning from them. This year's cohort mentioned visiting farms and towns (i.e. Aliquippa) and enjoyed learning about local economies and "third places." Students enjoyed hanging out with neighbors, working on the urban garden ("I liked enriching the land and releasing its potential for beauty"), and performing service in the community as part of the soup kitchen (although students usually admitted that they didn't always want to go). Finally, for some, one-on-ones with Wendy were some of their favorite times in City House, while for others the one-on-ones didn't resonate with them.

City House students, both current and former, reflecting on what aspects of City House had the greatest impact on them, all focused on Christian community within the house. Former City House students in particular noted that it was the interactions with their peers within the house that had the greatest impact on them long-term. Students identified the following high-impact aspects: living closely together, practicing hospitality together, breaking out into smaller groups for closer interaction, and prayer together. For example,

- We all come from different backgrounds. I'd lived in other community groups, but you didn't have to interact. [But in City House], you had to eat together, do chores. Interesting to see how different people are raised, different values, all within the Christian faith.
- The fact that we had to cook meals [had the greatest impact]. People had to go grocery shopping. I had never cooked before. Now I love cooking for people. Hospitality.

Former City House students seemed better able to evaluate what the precise impact was from these activities. They indicated that they learned to be more open with others, to listen, and to share their own point of view. Conflict resolution was mentioned by all former students. While students in the current cohort seemed unable to find the positive in interacting with difficult peers, former students noted that these were precisely the interactions that helped them to personally grow the most. Further discussion on this is presented in the **Christian Community** section of this report.

Students also indicated greater attention to where their food comes from as a result of their time in City House. Former students indicated that these aspects stayed with them long after they graduated. Finally, one former City House student is currently employed at another living-learning community in an urban setting. He indicated that City House changed his life both personally and professionally as he seeks to employ what he learned in City House in his full-time employment. He indicated that he felt that City House exemplified many successes in terms of civic engagement and Christian community and that he is finding it challenging to find the same level of success in his living-learning community.

### **Least Favorite Aspects**

Students were not unanimous about their least favorite aspects of the house; thus, no single feature stood out as being problematic across students. Focus seemed to reside on overall busyness. Students noted that adjustment during the fall term was difficult partly due to the amount of work. Many students regretted not spending more

time with neighbors or being more eager in their work with the soup kitchen; however, they indicated that in the fall particularly they felt too overwhelmed in balancing schoolwork, daily activities within City House, and community engagement. Since the daily activities within the house (i.e. cooking) were viewed as high-impact activities, and community engagement was viewed as being valuable, it was the academic part of the City House experience that students cited as being too much work.

An interesting area of critique focused on the segue between academic work and daily life. Some expressed awkwardness between formal and informal discussions within the house. Some students said transition from class time to regular life sometimes felt artificial and recommended that these transitions be “less structured.” For example, one student stated, “Wish some things were less structured; doesn’t allow room for some things to happen naturally. Forced, can be non-authentic.” A few students noted occasions when they would have preferred to let natural discussion flow rather than closing it off to begin a formal conversation as part of the class.

Related to this issue were the book discussions, which were a favorite activity for some and a least favorite activity for others. Those who didn’t like the discussions indicated that they “felt strained” and that they struggled with the abstract ideas being repetitively “hammered in” and would have preferred to focus on “practical things.” While some of these reactions may have to do with individual preferences or cohort differences from year-to-year, student comments indicating that they’d like to “expand on ideas in books rather than rehashing themes” coincide with other statements from

students hungering for more informal conversation on applying concepts rather than structured discussions.

General areas of challenge included the impact City House had on other activities, such as schoolwork, outside friendships, and evening events on campus. Most recognized that these conflicts were inevitable and didn't see them as overwhelmingly problematic, but just noted that they had to make choices in which they were increasingly cut-off from campus activities. Finally, conflict within the house was again mentioned as a least favorite aspect. Focus centered on peers not following rules or acting dictatorially.

## **Summary: Impact of Activities**

City House students identified activities that had the greatest impact on them in City House. Focus centered on activities inside the house, although some students felt that living in Beaver Falls alone made a big impact on them. Former City House students were particularly able to reflect on what the specific impact was, specifically in the areas of self-growth and greater intentionality in regard to food and place. Busyness, balancing activities, conflict resolution, and structured vs. informal conversations were all cited as challenges within the house. Student recommendations to address these challenges are incorporated in the following sections.



# Christian Community

Guiding questions:

- Does City House challenge students to engage in authentic ways with one another?
- Does City House spur students to greater emotional maturity, as they learn to relate to one another in meaningful ways?
- Does City House provide opportunities for students to hold one another accountable for greater spiritual maturity?
- To what extent does City House help deepen students' walk with Christ and with fellow Christians?

## **Authentic Engagement & Emotional/Spiritual Maturity**

According to former City House students, greater emotional and spiritual maturity was the primary way that City House influenced them. Reflections of this growth were remarkably similar across students. Essentially, students described having very high and somewhat naïve hopes about Christian community upon entering City House, followed by somewhat disappointing interactions between themselves and others. Many students indicated that it was very eye-opening to realize that some of these disappointments were actually due to flaws within themselves. Former students stated that while they may not have appreciated it at the time, they were later able to reflect on and then grow from these experiences. Students indicated that living and interacting so closely with others was the reason why these imperfections surfaced, and they were therefore able to learn about themselves and others in ways that they hadn't

expected. This ultimately helped them to find greater emotional and spiritual maturity.

The following comments are from former City House students:

- It's in conflict where your faith should shine...Being with others in close community forces out the worst in us. Communication problems that sin brings out. When you're by yourself, everything is hunky-dory. [Living in community] is a great way to live out your faith.
- Greatest shapers of my life—one of the deepest and most profound things was, "It always takes two." There's never one person in an argument. I thought I was a really good person before the house...How it impacted me? I'm broken. This stays with me since college. Look in my own heart before others' ...City House helped me to recognize this. I need to forgive as I've been forgiven.

As indicated in the **Impact of Activities** section, current City House students seemed less able to recognize the opportunities for growth that can arise out of conflict. Still, both former and current students were able to speak about themes of forgiveness, grace, humility, empathy, gentleness, and acceptance—qualities learned through living in City House. For example,

- Attributes like patience, grace, mercy, love, and tenderness have also been learned. Being able to practice these attributes has definitely been a challenge for me, but an acceptable challenge as I strive to be more Christ-like.

A key area of greater emotional and spiritual growth centered on learning to accept others. This became more feasible for students who became aware of their own

flaws and learned the wisdom of not always striving to change other people. Students expressed that they learned humility during the year and this caused them to be more accepting of others.

- Forgiveness and grace. Loving each other for who God made us to be. This helped us to love others outside the house. We're all humans made by God.
- I learned that people are not a problem to be fixed but rather a gift to be received.
- As a Christian, it is easy for me to judge other people for their actions and to not try to understand where they are coming from. I think that Christ's humanity shows me that if the Son of God can understand my downfalls, then I should be able to try and understand the downfalls of people around me. I should also try to point them towards the truth of Christ's redemptive power and healing.
- I've learned that everyone is incredibly broken, even the ones who don't seem like they would be...I knew these things were real- I just never realized how present they were in every single person. I'm not the only one.
- This semester God has been teaching me to accept people where they are at, and to understand that I do not possess the power to control their actions. I have become more and more understanding of my own pride and my own faults.

- I have learned that you can be who you are and not be judged, I have learned that you need to hear everyone out before you tell them they are wrong, I have learned that through someone struggle you can be there for them and that does not mean you have to fix them yourself, I have learned that sometimes silence means they want someone to try harder to reach out and let them know you care.

Since so many students described the experience of being confronted with their own flaws and failures during the year and having this realization draw them toward greater acceptance of others, this seemed to be a key learning experience within the house, across multiple cohorts of students. Conversely, the few students who expressed disappointment at the level of spirituality within the house seemed to view themselves as being more spiritual than those around them.

### **Accountability**

Students didn't speak directly about specific opportunities to foster accountability. However, some indicated that City House helped them to learn to trust other people and that this occurred by being surrounded by others as they listened to each other and shared insecurities. For example,

- City House has begun to teach me how to talk to people about things that are bothering me and to love and respect them enough to not simply be angry, but try to find a resolution.

Those who talked about these opportunities indicated that it was in informal sharing sessions that they felt this openness unfold. One student told a story of experiencing insomnia and coming down to the kitchen where he encountered a small group of other City House students who also couldn't sleep. They stayed up most of the night, talking and sharing, and encouraging one another. One former City House student, and one who later chose to direct a living-learning community as a career, said that this impromptu activity had a long-term effect on him. Sometimes, however, students seemed to misinterpret accountability as license to be overly-directive toward others' behavior. Thus, nearly all students indicated that conflict was something that they encountered during the year and had to address. As indicated previously, some grew substantially through this process while others came away with a negative reaction.

One recommendation from the students is that conflict resolution be more overtly discussed during the year. Some cohorts indicated that this was addressed during their year and that a guest speaker was asked to come in for the discussion. They found this to be a very valuable experience and wondered whether this could be expanded (such as inviting more guest speakers or more frequent sessions) to help prepare students for what they would encounter with the inter-group dynamics within the house as well as help them to practice strategies for getting along and resolving conflict.

Regarding enhancing Christian community within the house as well as peer accountability, student cohorts seemed to vary year-to-year in how well they bonded

with one another. While this is to be expected, some students helpfully gave some recommendations for how to enhance connectivity among students. For example, one student suggested finding ways to pair students up during service activities, much as is already done with cooking and household activities, so that students work with others who aren't already their close friends. Walking to the service activity and then time spent there gives opportunity for discussion and bonding. Shy students indicated that they personally would benefit from intentional pairing up in this manner early on to aid them with feeling comfortable with community engagement. Thus, students suggested that community activities be considered as additional opportunities for building community among house members.

### **Deepening Faith**

Students indicated that it was through prayer and Bible study that they felt they were able to open up to and connect with others within the house. These activities served to deepen students' faith as well as build community within the house. One student stated, "This has helped my Christian walk. Chipping away at rough spots of my worldview." Many students expressed that they would have liked to interact with one another more often in worship and prayer:

- Finally, I think there is an element to Christian community living that is very important, but it is one that we have not really embraced here at City House. That element is praying together. We pray every day before we eat together, but these prayers are always very focused on the meal we are about to eat...I do not know what community prayer time would or should look like, however I think it

could be something that draws us closer together as house members and as members of the Body of Christ.

Another student wrote similarly on this topic, offered explanation for why it is difficult to implement, and then concluded that some ownership of these activities is necessary for these ideas to succeed.

- We can implement Bonheoffer's ideas into our community house by adding more prayer, scripture, and songs to our daily life together. We have already attempted to create a Bible study on Wednesday nights, but we have found that there are just too many people in the house to have a steady group of people there each week...I cannot be upset with anyone for not reading the Bible with me if I do not first initiate it myself. I will commit to basing my conversation on Christ and always pray with my friends. Pretty soon, we will all be doing the same and growing in Christ together!

Finally, other students noted that they were pleasantly surprised by the opportunities to engage with other Christians in prayer within the house.

- I didn't expect to have housemates that were willing to pray for things with me and for me. I mean on campus I had friends that would pray for me and stuff but it's different when you live with people in one house and eat dinner with them and pray with them and have class with them.

Thus, it is apparent that realities and perceptions of engagement with one another through prayer and Bible study varied across individuals and cohorts. Overall, however, students expressed desiring more interaction with one another in these ways.

In addition to the virtues described earlier as outcomes of community within the house, students felt that they grew in the areas of loving others and showing hospitality to others. One student stated that this was a “great opportunity to learn to love your neighbor as yourself.” While most students articulating similar statements indicated that they learned to love others in the neighborhood, they primarily focused on increasing love and empathy toward those in the house—since that was the area of greatest struggle and greatest growth, typically. Regarding hospitality, one former student said

- “...hospitality. I’ve been thinking a lot about it recently. Once you graduate, it takes so much intentionality to live out what I learned. Hospitality—causing me to rethink how to do things.”

Other former students expressed mixed success with living as they learned to live while in the house. Since the interviewed former students were within a few years of graduating from college, they seemed to still be working out their identities, vocations, and sense of place. Most were not living in urban areas but were trying to consider what showing hospitality meant in the suburban and rural settings in which they currently live. More description of their efforts is described in the **Civic Engagement** section.

Finally, some students noted that they learned a lot about personal sacrifice during their time in the house.



- One main element that I believe to be very critical is the practice of sacrificing your own interests for the interests of others. This can take on many faces and can be shown in an assortment of ways...I am very thankful that people are willing to give me rides and sacrifice some of their autonomy to do so. This may seem like a small sacrifice in the grand scheme of life, however if we do not have a good handle on sacrificing in small situations we can never truly have a handle on sacrificing in larger issues and in the bigger picture of life outside the City House.
- Communities demand us to love, and to sacrifice, and to do so many things that defy our inherent sinfulness. Because of sin, community living will never become effortless or even easy.

Thus, while students pointed to overt acts of spiritual devotion as key ways in which to grow in their personal faith as well as community cohesiveness, they implicitly learned to behave as Christians through daily activities. This theme of believing connecting to doing will be explored further later in this section.

### **Initial Expectations about Christian Community**

A common experience in City House appears to be initial naivety regarding what a Christian community is and how difficult it is to be a Christian community. However, many students were able to think critically about Christian community, temper initial unrealistic expectations, and conclude more realistically what Christian community looks like.

- My understanding of Christian community has changed a lot over the past semester...I was expecting some kind of ideal community of Christians where we read the Bible, prayed, worshiped, and did outreach together on a regular basis. This is not what I found at City House. My expectations and my definition of Christian community have both changed...Christian community cannot become idealized because then it will become more likely to be idolized. A truly utopic Christian community is unachievable without the true presence and perfection of Christ.
- The fact of the matter is, the City House will never be a perfect or ideal community because the chaos of ten misaligned schedules doesn't allow it to be. It is a good place to live, with good relationships and good people and good dinners.
- Thinking, "This is what it means to live as the church." Other times, "when sin abounds, grace abounds more." Hurt and resentment. These broken moments forged me for the better.

This third student did note, however, that his/her cohort seemed to "function more in terms of individual friendships and relationships than community living." This student perhaps felt that while individual relationships grew that year, group cohesiveness was lacking. A student recommendation for addressing lack of cohesiveness was for groups to "focus on what we have in common" rather than overly focus on differences. On the other hand, other students noted that it is through learning that one differed from others in crucial ways that great growth occurred.

- ...I learned more about people and their opinions than I had previously known. It challenged me because I found that a lot of people do not agree with me on things of great importance. The discussion challenged me to think differently. It also challenged me to love people even though I may disagree with them extremely. I am learning new things everyday just by living with people that have different perspectives than I. Through living in City House, my faith is being tested and therefore being made stronger through new experiences and careful thoughtfulness.

Other students didn't seem to be disappointed when the whole group didn't interact as best friends, and instead found the multiple close relationships within the house to be exciting.

- I think it's so cool that even though I don't have a close relationship with every single person in the house I have definitely learned something from everyone.

Some students acknowledged the role that they themselves played in failing to foster greater cohesiveness within the house.

- While the community that I had dreamed of would be great – it really would – it would take a lot of work and patience. And with everything else that is going on in life – mostly school – I honestly don't know if I have time to invest in that. I think if I'm honest with myself, I do have time – but I don't necessarily want there to be.

Finally, one student noted that (perhaps in contrast to others) not having initially unrealistic expectations was helpful in terms of embracing community within the house.

- I think that coming in not really having crazy expectations helped me to be able to be open to my new surroundings. I think that we have a great group of people and Wendy you are doing a great job. I know we don't tell you enough but I am very thankful that you decided to start City House.

Views about Christian community, therefore, were a key aspect of change across time spent in City House. While not all students ended their time in City House with reconciling initial expectations, realities, and clear concluding thoughts about Christian community, others were clearly able to do so. Furthermore, the former City House students seemed to have learned much about Christian community to the point that they are currently trying to live out principles learned in their present lives. They articulated clear evidence of greater overall maturity in self-recognition of their own flaws and grace toward others'.

### **Learning About Christian Community**

In their journals, students wrote about what they learned of Christian community across the year. For example, through class readings, students learned to understand community living as a way to emulate the Godhead:

- ...that fact that I have a conception of God as being someone who lives in a community also impacts the way I live. Sometimes the idea of living in a community bothers me and sometimes I would prefer to just be alone...Although everyone tends to need breaks from people sometimes, God did not really make us to be completely alone. He made us to be like him. He made us to want to be communal and to care for and love other people.

- I do agree with the statement of community being in our very nature. I believe that God did make us social beings. Therefore I think that we must be social in some form or another.

Students also learned that living as a Christian community is practical, and exemplified in service to one another. In their journals, City House students showed that they linked the “believing” and “doing” aspects of their personal faith in response to what they were learning in City House.

- Another critical element of Christian community is being willing to go through with the responsibilities that are involved in living in a house. Throughout learning about all the different houses we visited and communities we read about, it seems that part of any house working well is to have it running smoothly in the practical everyday things of life. Chores must get done. Dinner needs to be cooked. Dishes have to be washed. These are the mundane tasks that make up life, but they are also the things that keep any community house running like a well-oiled machine.
- One way you can develop your identity as a housemate is either though it is not your night to do the dishes or you notice that they are not finished you can show the Lord you love Him through this type of worship.
- Earthy spirituality includes not only meeting with other Christians and discussing Biblical principles and ideas, but actually showing we have beliefs and strong convictions by intentionally acting them out. Our ideas of creation, fall, redemption, and consummation spread through every inch of the messy, complex web of our lives instead of being thought about at church and forgotten at home.

Some students learned to be very intentional about pursuing others in order to get to know them better. They realized that non-intentionality in this area can result in feeling like opportunities were missed and relationships uncultivated.

- Living with one or two people, it is easy to sink into a routine where little effort is required to maintain a friendship. However, with so many housemates during such a chaotically paced semester, I've had to learn how to pursue people and basically interrogate them about their lives on a regular basis if I want to keep a strong relationship with them. This is totally new for me.
- I've also learned how important it is to pursue people- at this point in life, people are terribly passive about relationships, and you will never get to know someone by waiting for them to come to you.
- To jump back to the initial question of Christian Community changes, I think it had changed. I view it now as much more of a sharing life together as opposed to being with each other 100% of the time. I think my view of the level of intentionality has increased, but that has to do with my view of time requirement has decreased and as time spent is decreased, intentionality must be increased.

This last point may be predictive in indicating who "succeeds" in interpersonal interactions within the house and who does not. Students disgruntled about interactions with others or spirituality within the house seemed to be very passive, waiting for others to step up in the desired ways. Additional focus on intentionality in interpersonal interactions may be helpful for students who need further reiteration of this point.

## Summary: Christian Community

Current and former City House students all pointed to Christian community as the area of greatest growth and impact on them. City House certainly encouraged students to interact in authentic ways with one another. Sometimes the process was painful and illuminating of flaws in oneself and others. For those students able to work through the messiness of everyday interactions, commit to getting to know one another and being open to one another, and take time to reflect on lessons learned, great personal and interpersonal gains were made. Some gains were long-reaching, and continue to affect former City House students long after graduation.

While concrete details on accountability and spiritual growth weren't always accessible to students' memories (students possibly will benefit from being more removed from the experience, with time to reflect), written and verbal statements did indicate growth in these areas. Greater emotional maturity definitely seems to be occurring through City House, as evidenced in the students' own words. Greater spiritual maturity seems possible through City House experiences, although students personally perceive successes and challenges in this area in different ways and may fail to see outward behavior as connected to greater spiritual maturity.

Some greater attention to restructuring activities may prove helpful. Students seem to want *less* structure and more fluid discussion of key course concepts yet *more* structured opportunities for spiritual engagement with one another. This may seem

counterproductive, since the former occurs as part of a credit-bearing course while there are problems with legislating the latter. Perhaps new cohorts of students can collaboratively decide about structured vs. unstructured discussions with the director at the start of the term and then revisit the plan later in the year. One student suggested just this, recommending that City House, “Adapt to how one group responds to an activity, and change plans mid-year if needed to make changes.” Finally, some consideration could be given to expanding the role of the house mentor so that this individual is more involved in Bible study and house discussions to enhance naturalness of these discussions (as an outflow of day-to-day conversation within the house), free the director up for focus on civic engagement, and help students who want to do this but fail to take the extra step in making such sessions happen.



# Civic Engagement

Guiding questions:

- Does participating in City House increase students' civic engagement?
- Do students complete the experience with a greater understanding of the role of civic engagement in the application of their Christian faith?

## Changes in Views of Beaver Falls

While quantitative measures did not show substantial changes across the year in terms of civic engagement and connecting civic engagement and faith, interviews and journal writings from City House students indicated growth in a number of key areas. One key area of growth was the way in which students perceived Beaver Falls. Some students began the year with a negative or neutral view of Beaver Falls partly based on what they heard from others; this perception changed substantially throughout the year.

- I had never really gone down into the downtown area and I hadn't heard much about it. And what I heard was negative...But then moving down there was fine. Not everyone down there was a drug addict! Up at Geneva that seems to be the feeling. But these people are just like us.
- Originally thought, "this is an ugly city." Always hearing about the danger...Since living in the house, more focus on what can I do to help, but more of an "us" rather than "them."
- Didn't think much of Beaver Falls—any other place, really...Have come to love Beaver Falls and appreciate it more.

Other students were open-minded about Beaver Falls prior to City House but they learned experientially rather than abstractly to love the town and its people.

- I don't know that the house gave me more insight, but having to walk through developed my interest in the city. The location of City House helped me to get to know Beaver Falls better.
- Makes a difference *living* somewhere. I used to come to Beaver Falls a lot in the past to shop, etc. I see more of the brokenness [now] but come to love it and identify with it more.
- I came in already on-board about Beaver Falls, and City House reinforced that. Christians need to be in forgotten and abandoned places. It's not about..."I can help you," but finding my place here. It's forming relationships.

Between City House activities, its location, and having to walk in the city, nearly all interviewed students described changes in their views of Beaver Falls as a result of their time in City House.

### **Beaver Falls and Engagement**

Regarding what student views of Beaver Falls changed to, students reported taking pride in Beaver Falls, identifying with its residents, and mourning with its struggles. For example,

- I was walking to school—get this—in the rain and passed a back hoe tearing down not one but two houses. I cried.
- I would love to see a pride in Beaver Falls, similar to what I read about in the history books.

Students also considered ways in which to help contribute in significant ways to the Beaver Falls community. Class readings helped students to consider how to contribute to systemic and meaningful changes within a community. For example:

- Helping people at soup kitchen is good but Jesus has something greater planned for us. He is not saying that helping people is bad but that there is something greater. Lupton says, "Give a man a fish and feed him for a day, teach a man to fish and feed him for a lifetime." Again, Lupton states, "Perhaps the deepest poverty of all is to have nothing of value to offer in exchange." ...People desire the need to have helped. It is where each individual finds his or her identity. It is important that we do not rob people of feeling valued because lack of feeling value can lead to despair and depression.
- So while charity actions may temporarily get a person, group or culture back on its feet the actions that Lupton suggests through his book and his statement have greater long term effects.
- ... I believe that we need a long-term solution to erase the problem of poverty in our society. The solution is not only by helping them to have a meal but it should be also relate[d] to education... We need to help them to find away [sic] to be responsible for themselves. The mission of Christ is to set the captive free not only spiritually but economically also.

Student ideas of ways to contribute to the community showed their ability to link their faith and engagement.

## Faith and Engagement

Students learned during their time in City House that the Christian impulse to focus solely on community members' salvation to the exclusion of other concerns was problematic. It was very evident that students connecting faith and engagement did not focus on "saving" the city. For example,

- I learned that people are not a problem to be fixed but rather a gift to be received. Is there need in the city? Is there people that desperately need a Savior? Of course, but if our/your mindset is that you are going to save this "heathen" city from the pit of hell you are going to have a horrible time. Not only will you be unsuccessful in your journey but you will miss the beauty and wisdom of the individual people.
- Evangelism isn't an event, it's relationships. Neighbors should move to [being] friends...
- We should care about the house, our neighbors, and our community. Through caring about the physical, humanly things of life, we can point people to the divine, just as Christ used his humanity to point us to the heavenly father and divine redemption.

Indeed, students seemed to gain an understanding of the connection between their role in civic engagement and their faith. One student wrote,

- This video has lead [sic] me to think and consider what is God's best for the city...God speaks through the minor prophet Micah and says "He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God. (Micah 6:8 ESV). I believe

that if we were able to “do justice,” love kindness, and walk humbly with our God we would see more revival and more revived people.

Student recognition of the connection between their faith and engaging with others seemed to come naturally to them, as if ingrained. To an interview question about the connection of engaging with their communities and their faith, one student said, “Not engaging with neighbors? It’s cold, hard, not human, not following what Christ called us to do.” Other students echoed this statement, essentially having the attitude, “Of course this is important.”

### **Engagement with Neighbors**

Frequency of student engagement with neighbors seemed to vary year-to-year and across individuals. On the surveys, current City House students had slightly higher averages on most neighbor engagement questions at the end of the year versus the beginning of the year. Individual students reported the frequency of engagement between every-other-day to once a month. Students and neighbors alike recognized that engagement increased in warmer months and decreased in colder months. Engagement increased with individual neighbors when students and neighbors found a point of connection, whether a pet, children, or common interest in a book. Neighbors and students all indicated the yearly block party significantly enhanced engagement. Students said that engaging with the neighbors was harder than they initially thought it would be; such statements support the conclusion that student survey answers in September were unrealistically high regarding how often they’d interact with neighbors

and how important such interaction was. Answers may have been tempered down by May as students factored in actual frequency of interaction.

Many students wrote of coming to love their neighbors and other individuals who live in Beaver Falls.

- The more “privileged” members of society (i.e.: college students) are proud, and unreceptive to caring advances. When you ask a well-to-do individual how their day was, you get a short, impersonal response. When you ask that same question to a down-on-their-luck lower-class person, you get their life story and a laundry list of things to pray for them about. Being able to listen to someone and care for them is a wonderful gift, and the people of the “abandoned places” are willing to give it, and to listen in return.
- ...I felt more connected to Beaver Falls because we realized that workers in stores are people, too, and we have a chance to let them into our lives by having a small but meaningful conversation.

One student reported that he/she was very intentional regarding interaction with neighbors, and worked with another City House student to develop a prayer list of neighbors and then commit to interact with each neighbor on the list. This student wrote:

- I feel like I have been balancing my time with them well; not bonding to them completely so that I cannot get any work done, but still welcoming them and enjoying their presence...Overall, I feel like I have made a lot of new relationships because of City House. Throughout the year, even as I get busier, I will have to keep their relationships a priority. This will mean intentionally taking advantage

of opportunities the neighbors give me to get to know them more. It will be difficult, but definitely worth the time.

Other areas of success with student engagement with neighbors included times spent sharing meals with neighbors. This seemed to make a big impact on the neighbors and they spoke more of such interactions than did the students. However, students included neighbors visiting at mealtimes as one of their favorite aspects of living in City House (along with other mealtime sessions in the house). In addition, one student wrote the following regarding neighborly behavior and food preparation:

- One time [students] were cooking and they needed cinnamon and we didn't have any. I decided to offer to walk over to someones [sic] house and I walked over to [a neighbor's] house. He was sitting on his porch and I was like "hey [neighbor's name] Can I have some cinnamon please?" and he was like "Sure! What's your name again?" and I was like "[name given]!" than he was like "come on in, you can meet my wife!" and I was like "Okay, YAY!"

A final area of success with student engagement with neighbors involved playing with neighborhood kids. Many students and neighbors reported that this was one of the most frequent types of interactions between City House students and neighbors. One student wrote:

- I love how we live in a neighborhood with so many kids. It brings so much life to the street. I love when I am outside and the kids yell out my name and ask me to play with them....It makes me feel really special.

Thus, while general frequency of engagement may vary, it is apparent that each cohort of City House students does interact with neighbors to some extent. Some neighbor-student connections are particularly strong and students seem to easily connect with neighborhood children.

However, City House students commonly reported that they wish that they had devoted more time to engaging with neighbors. Some seemed to feel that City House busyness and focus prevented them from engaging more, while others indicated that they themselves served as their own barriers to deeper engagement.

- City House was more focused in the house than I expected. 80% in the house, 20% outside.
- Feel like I could have done more but did the best I could.
- Could have done better. We did have a lot of people over and people felt comfortable. Mostly students. We could do better at being hospitable to neighbors.

Still, City House students seemed to learn basic principles for interacting with neighbors and they recognized that these principles could be applied to future engagement.

- ...we never know how a simply “hey, how are you doing” and actually listen to how their day went, can make a big impact on a person. Sometimes all we need is a smile. Sometimes all we need is one person to care enough to listen.



- My advice to you is to listen. Open your ears and receive the truth that some of these people are speaking. When they are speaking of something that is lacking hope season your words with the hopeful words that you carry because of Christ.

A specific area of application in the area of civic engagement were the concepts of rootedness and developing a sense of place in a community.

### **Sense of Place**

Students wrote of the importance of investing in a place and being “committed to the area that God currently has me and when it is time to be called to other place be committed there.” This commitment also extended to buying local food. Students, current and former, reflected a lot on what their learning in the current term meant for their future in terms of place.

- I will live wherever my passions are best used. If that somehow lands me in a city, so be it. I will embrace it if it happens. If I land in the middle of nowhere in the upper peninsula of Michigan where there are only four houses within 50 miles of me, that’s okay too. Not everyone is called to relocate. ..We don’t have to live in cities if it doesn’t suit us. God can use us anywhere. To imply otherwise is just silly.

As discussed in prior sections, however, current students’ surety at the “obviousness” of what they learned in City House did not necessarily automatically put them on a clear path once they graduated. Cultivating a sense of place and learning to apply principles learned in City House were significant concerns for former City House students—

concerns that all the interviewed former students were committed to working on but did not necessarily have down pat yet. This “in-between-ness” is a key feature of the emerging adult years. Thus, former City House students’ active grappling with these issues can be counted as a success and improvement over other emerging adults who find themselves to be in a more diffused condition in terms of sense of place.

### **Long-term Impact**

Former City House students, reflecting specifically on the long-term impact of City House on their engagement in their communities, indicated that they had been positively affected, currently were considering ways to implement what they had learned in City House, and also grappled with translating what they learned about Beaver Falls and engagement to their current situations. For example, one former student who identified as a fairly quiet person who had to be very intentional about interacting with others, stated the following in response to her current challenges with implementing what she learned in City House.

- There’s some people I want to visit and be part of their life. It would be nice if we all went to the same church. Sometimes I don’t even get to see my own parents. My one time off, I want to spend with my parents, but I also want to speak with this lady, this person. Travel is hard in rural communities. With cars, long distance has become acceptable but it’s still 30 minutes that have to be planned out. It’s hard for me to do that. But I realized in City House that it’s important to have people around you.

Another former student spoke of the realities of living in a fairly transient neighborhood but still trying to implement what was learned in City House. In stating that he learned to be more open and come out of himself, he added,

- Where I'm at now we have all these new neighbors. But it's something I've put more of an effort in. Just helping each other out. You bond with others and can start opening up about your faith.

Another student spoke of learning about the importance of neighbors and showing hospitality to one another.

- Neighbors are incredibly important and community is important, not that I always live it out. Hospitality opens our hearts to grace...it takes constant commitment: I'm going to be hospitable today.

A fourth student spoke of City House as being an ideal, and then grappling with living up to that while living in the suburbs.

- City House reminded me of the book of Acts. Everyone sharing things. You become family, brothers and sisters in Christ. And with the neighbors. I live in the suburbs...not a lot of the neighbors talk to each other.

In short, former students articulated the importance of intentionality when considering how to live out what they learned through City House. All indicated that City House had impacted them long-term regarding recognizing the importance of community and engaging with others. Most struggled, however, with the urban/rural/suburban nuances in community engagement.

## Summary: Civic Engagement

Changes in student views of Beaver Falls were evident in City House students.

Students starting the year with a negative or neutral perception of Beaver Falls came to realize that the city was not as dangerous as they had heard, began to identify with the

city, and came to love and appreciate it. Students who began their time in City House with an already positive view also grew in more specific knowledge of Beaver Falls rather than just thinking that they should love the city in the abstract sense. These students recognized the importance that just living and walking through Beaver Falls played in this change in perception.

Student readings and journaling throughout the year resulted in them considering ways to make systemic changes in the Beaver Falls community. Possibly for this reason, fewer students indicated that they felt it was important for Christians to engage in volunteer activities, from the start of their time in City House to the end. It may be that they were thinking of the importance of making systemic changes rather than engaging in charity activities.

Students seem to have gleaned the message that they are to care about individual relationships, community members, and communities rather than be solely focused on evangelizing. Comments about their current views on this arose spontaneously from students, in response to an interview question about the connection between civic engagement and faith. Since there are many possible directions for answering this question, it is notable that so many specifically addressed why their answer differed from what might be a more typical Christian answer. This appears to be a high area of success from the City House program.

Engagement with neighbors (in reality versus the abstract) varied across students and cohorts. Some students interact a great deal with neighbors. Many students primarily interact with the neighborhood children and with adults primarily at structured City House events (rather than one-on-one). Differences are observable in current and former City House students who articulated great intentionality and commitment to stepping out of comfort zones and engaging with neighbors versus students who were more lax about this during the year and felt some regrets by the end of the year.

Long-term impact of City House on former students in the area of civic engagement appears to have been strong, at least with the students who consented to be interviewed. They indicated an altered view of the importance of community and neighbor engagement as a result of living in City House. Due to the difficulties of applying what they learned in a very different setting, however, most didn't feel that they were exactly exemplifying what they had learned. Some of these students also seem to be integrating what they learned about themselves (greater humility, more accurate assessment of flaws) to civic engagement. They were not naïve about what it might take to fully live out what they learned, but they struggled with how to overcome some of the barriers. It might be beneficial to expand debriefing sessions before students leave City House to tackle some of these issues even more. On one hand, students probably will be unable to fully appreciate the differences between their time in City House and what comes next because they first need to *experience* what comes

next. However, perhaps it might be worth finding ways for former City House students to talk with current students about these issues as concretely as possible, and focus on how to implement what was learned when one lives in a rural or suburban community.

# Neighbors' Perception of City House

## Guiding Questions:

- How do neighbors perceive City House, its residents, and staff?
- Has City House impacted neighbors' perceptions of Geneva?

City House neighbors were the most effusive group in directing praise toward City House, what it represents, and how it functions. Neighbors spoke of their interactions with City House students, participation in house activities and events, what City House means for their community, and their recommendations for the continued functioning of City House.

## **Neighbor Interactions with City House Students**

Neighbor and student accounts of the frequency of interaction with one another aligned very well. Neighbors said that some years and with some students, they see and interact with City House students every day. Students and neighbors agreed that the every-day or nearly-every-day interaction occurs in warmer months, but interaction drops substantially in colder months. A few neighbors expressed wanting to spend time with City House students during winter months. Without being prompted, they said that they'd like to pitch in money to go bowling with City House students or consider some other activities beyond the block.

Some neighbors indicated, approvingly, that students sometimes come right up to talk with them and are open and friendly. However, other neighbors said that City House students start out with frequent interactions, but when school hits, “we only see them coming and going. Once in a while, they’ll ring our doorbell.” Some neighbors felt that former City House students interacted with them more, compared with more recent cohorts. Yet, none of the neighbors spoke disapprovingly of this, and instead indicated their recognition that students are busy and it is likely “physically impossible” to do much more than they are currently doing.

Besides engagement with City House students via community group activities, neighbors noted two key other ways in which they interacted: by students offering instrumental help to neighbors and by playing with neighborhood children. Neighbors expressed gratitude for students cutting grass and shoveling snow. They indicated that students gave help where it was needed the most, in terms of which neighbors were helped. They also knew and recognized that students help other individuals beyond the block. All of the neighbors offered positive comments about these student behaviors.

For example:

- They do a lot in the neighborhood.
- I can’t imagine what this neighborhood would be like without it.
- We’ve been extremely blessed with what they’ve been able to do thus far.



All of the neighbors spoke positively about City House students playing with young children in the neighborhood. Some neighbors mused whether City House students help keep a younger family in the neighborhood by their involvement in the children's lives. Neighbors spoke approvingly of the sports activities that City House students engaged in with the children and felt that the students served as mentors to the kids. One neighbor spoke of a specific mentoring relationship that was observed between a female City House student and a neighborhood girl and what a positive impact that relationship had on the girl. Another neighbor talked about how good the City House students were in working with kids with special needs and various conditions. The only negative mentioned was that neighborhood kids have a harder time than adults in adjusting to students leaving at the end of the year.

Neighbors spoke positively of *how* the students interacted with them: nonjudgmental, open, accepting of others. One neighbor commented favorably about how the students did not act in condescending ways toward neighborhood children who were less advantaged. Many neighbors spoke of being initially concerned about having college students move into the neighborhood, when City House first began. All indicated that none of their fears were realized. Some spoke almost perplexedly of how the City House students don't party at all. One neighbor said,

- You know college kids—but I’m not seeing any quirks...Never had anybody come over about issues. It’s almost like having another family there. They’re young adults. [We have] absolutely no complaints.

Regarding individual relationships with City House students, some neighbors said that they were still in touch with former students. Others indicated that a handful of students each year were “very special” in terms of interacting with neighbors, and the other students were “fine.” When asked what predicted who was in the “special” group, these neighbors said that such students were “more open,” more familiar with how to interact with kids, and more outgoing and friendly. As stated in the **Student Recruitment** section, neighbors spoke at length about the types of students who should be recruited for City House. For example, some neighbors spoke of wanting a mix of shyer and more outgoing students. Others noted a dearth of male students and indicated that the guys who are there tend to be less visible versus the girls. One neighbor spoke of being interested in seeing more student athletes live in the house, and one neighbor suggested this in order to build neighbor-student mentoring opportunities: “What about a football player that we can straighten out!”

### **City House Activities & Events**

Neighbors spoke of what they enjoyed the most about activities with City House residents. Every neighbor spoke about the block party and neighborhood garden. They indicated pleasure at seeing the block party growing every year and reaching beyond

the block. Regarding the garden, neighbors said they loved that students go door-to-door with fruit and vegetables. All neighbors spoke approvingly of how the more elderly residents receive firstfruits from the garden.

Neighbors spoke quite frequently of mentoring relationships within the community as a result of City House. Again, they felt that City House students served as mentors to neighborhood children. Another way in which this was shown is when students elicit neighborhood kids to help in the garden; neighbors who observed this spoke approvingly of this practice. Neighbors admitted that they try to pay attention to activity in the City House kitchen (“What’s cooking,” as one neighbor put it) and talked about reciprocity in meals in which neighbors invite students and vice versa. Some neighbors indicated that they see themselves as mentors to City House students and would be interested in expanding this role. They viewed their relationships with City House students as reciprocal ones; that is, City House students offer instrumental help in the neighbor and in turn receive an adult mentor in the community.

### **Community**

Neighbors all agreed that City House helped to contribute to a “strong community feeling,” as one neighbor put it. Most neighbors said that they felt that this neighborhood was preferable to others in Beaver Falls and that this contributes to neighbors not wanting to leave. Neighbors clearly indicated that City House contributes significantly to making the neighborhood a better place to live.

One neighbor spoke at length about City House's role in revitalization. By improving the appearance of the neighborhood, he said, City House models pride in one's home and neighborhood. This neighbor felt that endeavors like City House are key to revitalizing Beaver Falls. He also said that City House students and staff model friendliness and openness that others in the neighborhood can imitated. He added,

- Beaver Falls is at a crisis point; opportunities are slipping away. Some things have to be done; it doesn't have to be big. Choices are few. We need a lifting of our vision so we can see Beaver Falls in a better place. In its own small way, City House has provided a bit of vision to say, "It can be better."

Another neighbor stated,

- They're involved with young people and children on our street. I think that really has a good impact on the neighborhood. Sets up for a really safe environment. They're on the porch on a regular basis, coming and going. I think their presence has helped. We used to have a lot of drug activity. We did get that out before they started. Their presence here has helped keep drug users and sellers from coming...helps keep unwanted things away. Since they've been here, we haven't had any cars vandalized. We've not had any incidences whatsoever. With them here, I feel quite safe...It does give you a greater sense of security.

A few neighbors spoke strongly of wanting to see City House succeed and then expand beyond this neighborhood. They indicated that they would like to see the City House project replicated in another neighborhood in order to revitalize Beaver Falls.

- Wendy mobilized community resources. [Now the community is] bettering its own lot. If we can do that next level, city-wide is our objective.

City House neighbors emphatically expressed appreciation and love of the City House director. It was abundantly evident that tight community bonds exist between neighbors and the director. In answering interview questions, sometimes it seemed that neighbors were speaking of the house itself and other times they specifically had the director in mind. For example, when asked whether they felt that City House was meeting its goal of engaging in the Beaver Falls community, one neighbor responded, “She’s doing a good job.” Another neighbor mused at length about City House’s sustainability beyond the director’s involvement.

- Without Wendy, there is no City House. You have to have a prime person. Sustainability will be based on grooming someone, which she’s started. Begin to push that person forward, let them become more of the face. You open the doors, and have that new person begin to develop relationships. So when you leave, the ministry doesn’t go down the tubes. I think students would be able to accomplish most things without

Wendy, but it wouldn't be as organized. Comes back to not having all new people every year—would help with sustainability.

This neighbor's last sentence refers to his recommendation to, if at all possible, encourage students to stay in City House for multiple consecutive years. He felt that students were noticeably more engaging when they stayed and that it was easier for neighbors to get to know them. He added, "I can watch them develop the longer they're here. Some come in pretty timid."

Although neighbors were not directly asked what they felt about City House meeting its goal of fostering Christian community, some neighbors volunteered their thoughts about this. One neighbor said that students were doing a great job at being "Christians in the community." Another neighbor said that "religion" has nothing to do with why City House is successful; they attributed its success to the director and the "good kids." Again, all neighbors spoke approvingly of the good behavior of City House students. As one neighbor stated, "It shows how they've been raised. They know right from wrong. They know who they are."

Neighbors spoke of embracing students as neighbors and felt like students did the same for them. They said that the City House students "don't act like townies" and they are "less Geneva College kids and more our neighbors." Neighbors indicated that City House students do not separate themselves from the community and successfully identify with it. Two neighbors volunteered percentages indicating their views of

effectively City House students are engaged in their neighborhood and Beaver Falls: 95% and 98%, respectively.

### **Changed Perceptions of Geneva College**

Regarding whether City House helps to change neighbor views of Geneva College, three types of responses occurred: 1) City House exposes neighbors to Geneva students, and these neighbors marvel at how different these students are from “townies”; 2) City House bridges a large gap between Geneva and Beaver Falls; 3) City House shows ways in which Geneva can be more effective in living out a Christian mission.

Regarding response #2, one neighbor said, “For being a college town, you could easily live your whole life and never cross 26<sup>th</sup> street if not visiting the football field.” Neighbors indicated that Geneva and Beaver Falls are in a “them” and “us” situation. Yet, City House, according to one neighbor,

- brings students to the community, broadens awareness the community has of the college. I see the principles of the college represented by the students.

This neighbor indicated that City House therefore breaks down barriers between neighbors and the college and clearly communicates Geneva’s mission.

Regarding response #3, one neighbor said,

- I personally have some issues with Geneva College. I see City House in a way that fulfills their mission, there there's a lot of things Geneva can do that would fulfill their mission that they cop out of...Geneva should be first and foremost Christian. City House does not sharpen the image of Geneva, but does shed a light on Geneva students. The young adults are great students. That's what comes across. They're a family that's very considerate of their neighbors. They've been considerate in the way they park their cars, helping do the sidewalks and stuff. IT's been like another family who happens to all go to college.

This response also reiterates the greater familiarity that comes from students living off of College Hill. Just as the students needed to live in Beaver Falls in order to change their views of the city in key ways, neighbors will remain in an "us" and "them" relationship with the college unless they interact and live alongside individuals from the college.

Neighbors seemed interested in convincing students that the neighborhood was a safe place, and passing along this message to other Geneva students.



## Summary: Neighbors' Perceptions

Neighbors were extremely positive when speaking about City House. While they acknowledged that they would like to interact more with City House students, they recognized that weather and overall busyness were legitimate barriers that might make greater engagement unfeasible.

Neighbors commented on the qualities of students who seem to engage more: openness, friendliness, and overall outgoing personalities seemed to translate to better engagement. One neighbor recommended that the house mentor play a greater role in encouraging the less engaged students to come out of their shells a bit more. He also expressed disappointment that the mentor herself did not engage much in the community, and seemed confused about what her role was. It may be worth considering ways to structure this role more concretely and have the house mentor serve behind the scenes, in her role as helping to promote Christian community within the house, to encourage students to meet personal and group goals in community engagement outside of the house.

Neighbors unanimously felt that City House significantly contributed to their community. Some felt that they would like to see the project expand. They recognized that City House's success largely rests on the exceptional engagement and bonds begun between the community and City House director. Many neighbors seemed to base their

positive assessments of the house on their relationship with the director rather than the students. This is to be expected, due to student turnover and logistics in developing new relationships each year. However, perhaps greater attention can be given to intentionality with students' community engagements. A few neighbors spoke of students turning down neighbor invitations due to busyness or (according to the students) discomfort. While some neighbors shrugged this off, others seemed a bit offended. One neighbor mentioned that he was bothered when the house mentor turned down multiple invitations as well.

Because City House itself and the director have obviously established themselves and become accepted within the community, it is embraced by its neighbors. Even a passive role from students is viewed by neighbors positively; City House students' very presence makes the neighborhood a better place to live. Neighbors are delighted at student behavior in the house and in their neighborhood. In addition, some students have connected well with neighbors and these connections impact students and neighbors long-term. However, many other students are less successful in building connections with neighbors; problems seem to reside on the student rather than neighbor end generally. Neighbor recommendations for about getting more students to stay consecutive years may help with students who take a long time to become comfortable with stepping out into the community.

## Conclusion

Six City House targeted areas were assessed for this project: Student Recruitment, Student Experience, Impact of Activities, Christian Community, Civic Engagement, and Neighbor's Perception of City House.

Regarding student recruitment, City House had a positive reputation among Geneva community members participating in the City House survey. Greater familiarity with City House as a result of participating in the survey spurred some to say that they'd now recommend that students participate in the future. Respondents saw the alignment between Geneva and City House mission but noted some differences. Students considering applying to City House were most concerned about the workload.

For this reason, as well as City House student comments saying that high academic workload may serve as a barrier for more hands-on engagement, it may be worth considering whether readings and journaling can occur less frequently and still make the desired impact. Increasing high-impact practices on City House students' current and long-term functioning and letting up somewhat on important practices that can perhaps occur less frequently may help with student workload, enhance engagement (or at least reduce excuses for lack of engagement), and help communicate to interested students that participation in City House is do-able. Finally, multiple groups (neighbors, students, and Geneva respondents) offered suggestions for student cohort

composition. Capitalizing on these suggestions is of course predicated on applications increasing so that greater selection can occur. Ideas for expanding the house mentor's role were presented in multiple places; assistance with student recruitment in terms of bridging the information gap between campus and City House is one possible expansion.

Student experiences in City House were generally positive and life-changing. Although student averages increased in some areas on the survey assessment of student learning outcomes, slight decreases were noted for other areas. This is most likely due to a ceiling effect, and qualitative data obtained from interviews clearly indicates student learning in key areas. One area of concern to perhaps note was the decrease in students reporting conversations with neighbors that broaden one's views. Frequency on this item did not start very high at the start of the year and decreased somewhat at the end; student variability on this item was very high. Greater intentionality in regard to individual conversations with neighbors, paired with a corresponding decrease in some other activities, may help to address this decrease (which was one not bolstered by qualitative data indicating meaningful neighbor-student conversations).

The decreases on the connection between community engagement and faith may partly be due to inflated scores in September and difficulty accessing this information cognitively in the midst of the experience. Since former students were far better able to articulate this connection and apply it to their current lives, students may

need reflective space and time as well as distance in order to properly consider how to make these connections and what it looks like in their own lives.

Regarding the impact of activities, students were fairly unanimous about the most impactful activities, which primarily centered on conversations and mealtimes in the house. Students cited Christian community within the house as the most impactful aspect of City House, particularly long-term. Interesting student comments focused on the difficulty of *living* an education experience; where does class end and “real life” begin? Some attention to minimizing artificiality in transitional moments and again decreasing frequency of academic-based discussions while maintaining or perhaps increasing recommended/required interactions within and outside of the house may help address this issue.

When looking specifically at what students learned about Christian community and how they changed as a result of living with others in the house, students identified specific areas of growth. The list includes greater awareness of one’s own flaws, learning about oneself and others through positive and negative interactions, learning to forgive and show grace and gentleness toward others, greater humility, learning to accept others and empathize with them. This last quality is perhaps the greatest lesson learned, at least in terms of the greatest number of students indicating that this is what they learned. This quality also coincides with how neighbors perceive City House students—as very accepting. When reflecting on whether City House helped to deepen their faith and walk with Christ, students focused on inner dimensions of spiritual practices rather

than changes in their outward behavior. This is likely a reflection of what they learned from their Christian communities prior to living in City House. Still, when speaking of engagement, students were easily able to talk about faith and belief in general and its connection to engagement.

Students expressed wanting greater focus on spiritual disciplines such as Bible study and communal prayer inside the house. Since students seem to have not taken responsibility at making sure these communal activities occur at the level of frequency they desire, this may be another potential role for the house mentor, perhaps decided in collaboration with students at the start of the term. Some changes in this area may also help with student recruitment, for Geneva students, faculty, and staff who perceive City House as not emphasizing spirituality. One notable exception to this inner/outer dichotomy was hospitality. Students saw this as a key area of both outward and inward growth as a result of their living in the house and readily connected this quality with showing love toward others. This may be in response to direct teaching on this topic, since student journal writings reflecting on “earthy” spirituality bridged the gap between inward and outward spirituality. Perhaps additional areas such as conflict resolution and operationalizing other ways to show love to one another can be additionally developed to help students who have difficulty with applying the abstract concepts discussed. While some students disliked what they perceived as repetitive themes during the course, the theme of hospitality was one evidently learned and taught in multiple ways during the year. Thus, decreasing emphasis on this topic may be

unwise since current methods are having high success. There may perhaps be other topics that can be decreased somewhat to make room for topics that help students to bridge the divide between civic engagement in the abstract versus in actuality.

Although Christian community was cited by current and former City House students as being the most impactful area to them, both groups indicated key changes in the area of civic engagement as a result of their time in City House. Some of these changes may actually be conceptual rather than practical. That is, both groups spent (and still spend) a lot of time thinking about how to engage in their communities as a result of what they learned in City House. Engagement during their time in City House as well as afterwards is not necessarily as high or as successful as they would like; however, students grew in their *recognition* of the importance of civic engagement, reasons for this importance, and ideas about what it can look like.

Intentionality seems key; while students learned the importance of civic engagement intellectually, only some seemed to really implement—individually—what they learned to a high extent. Former City House students seemed later able to realize that without intentionality, engagement is not going to just happen. This is again another reason to consider what topics which, albeit important, may be less important to City House's goals than getting students to intentionally engage with neighbors and community members on a regular basis. Student suggestions of ways to pair up with other students in order to bolster confidence as well as having former City House students speak with current groups about regrets at not engaging may also be useful.

Students may need more explicit focus on concrete ways to engage with others, even through simple conversations. House expectations about responding to neighbor invitations may also need to be set. Finally, additional debriefing sessions about applying principles learned in City House to non-urban settings may be very helpful for students who are very on-board with the concepts learned but confused about how to implement. They may have no one else in their lives articulating these concepts and must instead rely on what they learned in City House.

Finally, it is clear that City House neighbors love City House and that they particularly love the City House director. They are interested in more opportunities at engagement with City House students, but are not critical of current levels of involvement. However, some neighbors did seem to have individual students in mind when discussing some who did not seem to be as engaged or open to interacting. Student helpfulness in the community and interaction with children seem to be high areas of success. Full-group activities such as the block party and gardening also seem to be successful. Additional areas of growth could be one-on-one and small group interactions with neighbors, openness to visiting neighbors at their houses, and openness to allowing neighbors to take on a mentoring role.

For that latter point, the topic of reciprocity may be one worth addressing in more detail during the year. While students seem to be learning that their role is not to “do for” others who are disadvantaged but to be part of the community, they may not necessarily see the beauty in letting themselves be helped by others in the community.



Some neighbors clearly view themselves as mentors and would like additional opportunities for this. Some neighbors are so on-board with this idea that they think it's worth the risk to let in more "problem" students that they can help mentor them! City House neighbors made fairly powerful comments about their view of the role of City House in their community and in revitalizing Beaver Falls. While the scope of their recommendations may not be feasible, at least in the near future, it is encouraging to hear their hope and optimism and City House's contributions to their positive statements. While the scope of this project did not include sustainability of City House, neighbor comments show that they have some opinions on this topic should their views be solicited in the future.