

Anglican priest studies spirituality of snowboarding



Photo/Shanty Creek Resort

An Anglican priest in British Columbia has just earned a doctorate, looking at the spirituality of snowboarding. Rev. Neil Elliot of St. Andrew's Anglican Church in Trail investigated "soulriding" - examining whether there was a spiritual dimension to snowboarding down a mountain. The priest's findings don't bode particularly well for organized religion.

What he learned from his research is that context and location largely determine whether an experience is spiritual. For example, he said, many people describe their experiences with nature as spiritual, but few would use the same term in reference to a night of fun at a club downtown. "It may be the same kind of experience, but they don't frame it as spiritual because of the context."

His research contains bad news and good news for organized religion. "One thing that was very clear in the research that I did is that people didn't see any necessity to include God or any kind of structure in their understanding of spirituality. In fact, a number of people said it's about spirituality; it's not about God."

"That's quite challenging, coming from an institutional church which very much sees God as key in spirituality."

His work also brought him to the conclusion that people want community but they don't want institutions, rules and regulations. Although he insists churches are communities, they are often viewed as inflexible institutions and that's what drives people away.

"We need to help people see that we're a community and not an institution," Elliot said. "Ironically, the challenges that we're facing in terms of finances and

congregations are actually helping us to do that, because we haven't got the money to prop up the institutional stuff [any more]."

The Vancouver Sun ?has more here.