



ACTS

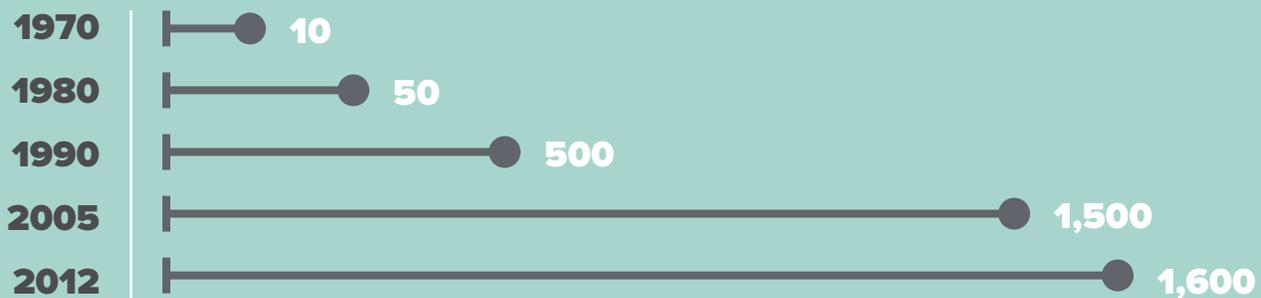
ABUNDANT COMMUNITIES

Sent Together

Catalyzing a Missional Movement in Your Community



Approximate number of U.S. congregations with 2,000+ in weekly attendance:



The number of megachurches in America has nearly doubled during every decade over the last half century. In 1960, there was 1 megachurch for every 7.5 million Americans. In 2010, there was one for every 200,000 Americans. There are as many megachurches today in the greater Nashville area as there were in the entire country. According to research by Dr. Warren Bird of Leadership Network, while almost 10 percent of Protestant church-goers attend a megachurch, the churches only represent about half of one percent of nearly 320,000 Christian congregations in the country.

According to Dr. Thom Rainer, President of Lifeway Christian Resources, 3,500-4,000 churches close their doors permanently every year in the U.S. Accelerated closing of churches. The institutional church stubbornly resists formal closing. Even if only six or seven people attend each week, those few fight for the survival of their church. Those who were attending these very small churches are either moving to the “nones” category, or they are moving to larger churches. The primary stalwarts to keep the doors open are members of the builder generation, those born before 1946. As that generation decreases at an increasing rate, more churches will close. Dr. Rainer believes the number of churches closing per year could reach the 8,000 to 10,000 level.

The United States is the fourth largest "lost" nation in the world behind China, India and Indonesia.

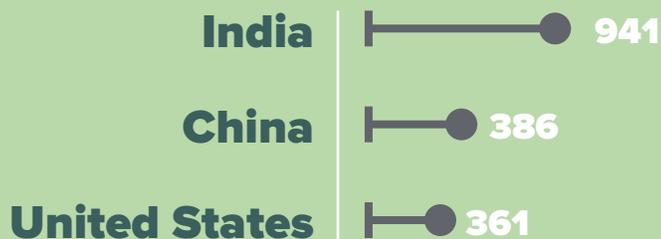
America is a less Christian nation than it was 20 years ago, and Christianity is not losing out to other religions, but primarily to a rejection of religion altogether.

The percentage of Americans who identify themselves as Christian has fallen over the last two decades. Seventy-five percent of Americans call themselves Christian, according to the American Religious Identification Survey from Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut. In 1990, the figure was 86 percent.

In the twenty year period between 1990 and 2010, the U.S. Population grew by 24% (60 million), while the number of Americans who would identify themselves as "Christian" has declined by 11%.



The United States has the 3rd largest number of unreached people groups.



The fastest growing "religious" group in America is made up of people with no religion at all, according to a Pew survey showing that one in five Americans is not affiliated with any religion.

The number of these Americans has grown by 25% just in the past five years, according to a survey released Tuesday by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life.

The survey found that the ranks of the unaffiliated are growing even faster among younger Americans.

Thirty-three million Americans now have no religious affiliation, with 13 million, in that group identifying as either atheist or agnostic, according to the new survey.

John 4:35

Do you not say, 'There are yet four months, then comes the harvest'? Look, I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see that the fields are white for harvest.

Acts 17:26-27

And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us.

Missiologist and Author Alan Hirsch observes...

"The church as we now know it can reach around 40% of the US population, the 60% needs a new approach.
#missionalchurch"

Luke 5:38

But new wine must be put into fresh wineskins.

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Exegeting Your Community



Exegesis Defined

Exegesis, (noun) critical explanation or interpretation of a text, esp. of scripture
: the task of biblical exegesis

ORIGIN early 17th cent.: from Greek *exēgēsis*, from *exēgeisthai* 'interpret,' from *ex-* 'out of' + *hēgeisthai* 'to guide, lead.'

1 Activity One

Draw a diagram of your neighborhood. Place a symbol for your church/house church in the place where it is located within your neighborhood. Identify other places where people gather in your community (schools, restaurants, coffee shops, parks, etc...)

“To love your neighbor intelligently and to share your faith credibly, you must first understand your neighbor. You must learn your neighbor’s history, values, fears, dreams, and mode of operation. Once you begin to learn your neighbors, you have information by which you can most effectively love and communicate to them.”

Question One

What is Your City’s History?

One of the characteristics of healthy cities is their unique ability continually to reinvent themselves around the ideas and innovation of their people. The powerful combination of clustered density and connective diversity not only produces amazing culture and technology, it also sustains cities through dramatic changes in the historical, economic, and social climate.

Question Two

What are your city's values?

Most businesses and nonprofits have a set of core values that shape their DNA and culture. Cities also have core values; the only difference would be that a city's values are generally assumed rather than stated.

Question Three

What are your city's dreams?

Question Four

What are your city's fears?

A city's fears say almost as much about it as its idols do. If you know your city's vulnerabilities, you will be able to apply the comforting truths of the gospel directly to the hearts of your neighbors.

Question Five

What is your city's ethos?

Ethos: the characteristic spirit of a culture, era, or community as manifested in its beliefs and aspirations (Ex: Part of the ethos of the 60s was to challenge/question authority.)

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Activity Two

Around your table, brainstorm about things you can do to find the answers to these questions.

- Demographic research (census.gov)
- Lighthouse Movement
- Prayer-walk
- Visit your local library
- Frequent neighborhood coffee shops, restaurants, stores
- Subscribe to neighborhood, community newspaper
- Attend neighborhood association meetings
- “Join” the neighborhood Facebook page

One of the classic texts from the Bible on cultural exegesis is found in Acts 17:16-23.

Let's read it.

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Activity Three

Around your table, answer these questions. Appoint a “scribe” to record your answers and select a spokesperson to share with the larger group.

- What did Paul see? (17:16)
- How did Paul feel? (17:16)
- What did he do?
- Where did he go?

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Activity Four

Turn to Appendix B “Twenty Five Ways to be Missional in Your Neighborhood”. In your groups, select 3-5 ideas you could use this summer. Begin to make an implementation plan.

Appendix A

Exegeting The Neighborhood Within The City

By J.r. Woodward, V3 Church Planting Movement



So how do we go about reading our neighborhood within the context of our city? While neighborhoods within larger cities are quite different from one another, it is helpful to give some focus to the neighborhood within the city and the city itself. One of the ways to do this is by understanding the basic culture of the neighborhood and city. While there are many good ways to do this, I want to show you how to do this by looking at some of the key elements of the cultural web that I developed to understand the cultural of a congregation. For the same elements are essential to any culture, and can help us to discern the nature of our neighborhood within city.

In its most basic form, culture includes six elements – language, artifacts, narratives, rituals, institutions and ethics. These elements interrelate to create culture and make up what I call the “cultural web.”

To simplify things even further, there are four basic questions you can ask to gain a fairly good understanding of a particular neighborhood and/or city, based on the key elements of a culture.

Narrative: What story is the city calling us to embody?

Rituals: What is the core practices that people engage in which shape their identity and sense of mission in life?

Institutions: What are the primary institutions that are shaping the city, and how are they shaping people’s identity and destiny?

Ethics: How would your neighborhood and/or city define success?

Narrative

What story is the neighborhood within the city calling us to embody? When seeking to understand the narrative of a people, you need to consider what they believe about God, or if they believe in God (theology), what they believe with a sense of confidence (doctrines), and the (stories) that they tell each other, the stories that they live into based on the music they listen to, and the various kinds of media that to which the continually expose themselves.

Here are some questions that help us get to the heart of the overarching story that our city is calling us to embody.

- What are the key slogans of the city or neighborhood?
- What are the prime landmarks, and how do they shape the narrative of the neighborhood?
- What kind of music do people tend to listen to?
- What lyrics do they have committed to memory, and what story is that calling them into?
- What are people’s favorite films and what lines can they quote by heart?
- What are people’s dreams and hopes?
- What are their fears and stresses?
- What do people think about God, about Jesus, or about the church?
- What places of worship are in the neighborhood and what do they tell us about the neighborhood?
- How do people think about money and power?
- What are the idols of the neighborhood?
- Who has “played God” in the city and how has that shaped the cities story?
- What are important moments in the history of the city, or kairos moments in the life of the city or neighborhood?

Rituals

What are the core practices that people engage in which shape their identity and sense of mission in life? To understand the life shaping rituals of the neighborhood within city, you need to observe the formal ceremonies that are fused with meaning that people engage in (rites), the common (practices) in which people routinely engage, and the everyday (liturgies) that people partake in that shape their ultimate desires, identity and sense of the good life.

Here are some questions that help us to understand the thick practices that people routinely engage.

- What activities do people engage in which give them a sense of worth?
- What holidays are celebrated with the most vigor?
- How are these holidays celebrated and in how do they shape people's ultimate desires?
- How do people approach their work, as a career or a calling?
- What do people do in their "free" time and how much "free" time do they have?
- Other than work, what do people devote the most time toward?
- What third spaces do people engage with the most?
- How do people spend their time, their money and their talents?
- In what ways do people seek to meet their need for beauty?
- Do people tend to work for the common good of the neighborhood or for their own good?

Institutions

What are the primary institutions that are shaping the city, and how are they shaping people's identity and destiny? Institutions have certain (structures) that speak to the distribution of power and decision making, (systems) that either encourage the flourishing of the city or demise of the city, and (symbols) of success and failure that shape people's sense of worth.

- Which companies are the primary employers of the city?
- Do the primary employers look out for the common good of the city or their own good?
- Is the government centralized or decentralized giving power to the local neighborhoods?
- Does the police force look out for the underprivileged or add to the divisiveness of the city?
- Do the lawmakers and judges treat the people with fairness or with favoritism?
- How do the various institutions deal with immigrants as people made in the image of God or a problem?
- If there is gentrification happening in the neighborhood, are the displaced treated as full human beings?
- Who founded the hospitals, how do they operate and do people have equal access to health care as people made in God's image?
- Is it easy or difficult for small businesses to flourish in the city?
- Which institutions are caring for the homeless in a God honoring way?
- Are churches seeking to bring a greater sense of the kingdom to their neighborhood or looking out for themselves?
- What is the reputation of the religious leaders churches in the neighborhood?
- Who are the most powerful people in the city and do they promote justice or their own welfare?
- What are the most influential media institutions and how does their reporting influence people?
- What are the primary educational institutions and how are they shaping the life of the children and the city?
- Does everybody have equal opportunity when it comes to education?
- What are the significant universities in the city or neighborhood and in what ways are they influencing the people in the neighborhood?
- What is the built environment of the city (the cities approach to architecture, parks and sustainability), and does it add to the flourishing of the city or not?

Ethics

How would your city and/or neighborhood define success?

Ethics are the moral convictions that shape the life of community and speak to people's sense of (being), which in turn shape people's (doing). Ethics require space and time for people to engage in (reflecting) on their lives and their neighborhood, in order to examine if they are promoting the common good.

- Does the pace of life in the city aid or hinder people's ability to engage in solitude, silence and reflection?
- Does the built environment (design of the city, neighborhood) help people be fully human or add to agitation people feel?
- Does the art scene help people in the neighborhood and city to consider the important questions the community ought to address or add to the duress of the people?
- How do the primary modes of transportation shape people's sense of being?
- Who promotes and hinders justice in the neighborhood?
- How does the city shape people's conception of the good life?
- Does the city promote the "American dream" or God's vision for the future, and how does this shape people's imagination?
- Do the laws and enforcement of the laws help each person of the city, no matter what class or ethnicity they may be, feel like a person made in the image of God?
- Does the city's description of the "good life" cause people to consider others more important than themselves or to look out for number one?
- What behaviors are rewarded and what behaviors are punished?
- How does the city government budget reflect her understanding of success?

In Conclusion

While this is not a comprehensive approach to exegeting the neighborhood within the city, by answering these four primary questions, you will have a greater ability to understand how to be the good news in your context. For the more we understand the culture of our neighborhood, the better we can bear witness in word and deed to our neighborhood, bring the transforming power of the gospel to our neighborhoods within our cities, and make the invisible kingdom more visible.

Appendix B

25 Simple Ways to be Missional in Your Neighborhood

by Josh Reeves, Verge Network



1. Stay outside in the front yard longer while watering the yard.
2. Walk your dog regularly around the same time in your neighborhood.
3. Sit on the front porch and letting kids play in the front yard.
4. Pass out baked goods (fresh bread, cookies, brownies, etc.)
5. Invite neighbors over for dinner.
6. Attend and participate in HOA functions.
7. Attend the parties invited to by neighbors.
8. Do a food drive or coat drive in winter and get neighbors involved.
9. Have a game night (yard games outside, or board games inside.)
10. Art swap night – bring out what you're tired of and trade with neighbors.
11. Grow a garden and give out extra produce to neighbors.
12. Have an Easter egg hunt on your block and invite neighbors use their front yards.
13. Start a weekly open meal night in your home.
14. Do a summer BBQ every Friday night and invite others to contribute.
15. Create a block/ street email and phone contact list for safety.
16. Host a sports game watching party.
17. Host a coffee and dessert night.
18. Organize and host a ladies artistic creation night.
19. Organize a tasting tour on your street (everyone sets up food and table on front porch)
20. Host a movie night and discussion afterwards.
21. Start a walking/running group in the neighborhood.
22. Start hosting a play date weekly for other stay at home parents.
23. Organize a carpool for your neighborhood to help save gas.
24. Volunteer to coach a local little league sports team.
25. Have a front yard ice cream party in the summer.

Appendix C

Resources



Books

Leading Missional Communities by Mike Breen

The Externally-Focused Church by Rick Rusaw and Eric Swanson

Creating a Missional Culture by J.R. Woodward

City Church by Timothy Keller

Counterfeit Gods by Timothy Keller

Websites

<http://www.vergenetwork.org>

<http://jrwoodward.net/>

<http://www.missio.us/>

<http://www.exponential.org/>

Other

Lighthouse Movement

<http://www.lighthousemovement.com/Brix?pageID=13452>

http://community.elevatorup.com/missionamerica/assets/LHbrochure_BW.pdf