



Growth Step 1

Discover



Discover

Learn more about church
and community trends.

Internal Trends

Review church health indicators to reveal
where ministry is working and where it isn't.

Community Research

Learn more about your community.

Outreach Focus

Identify the church's outreach focus—your target.



Where You Are

Stop for a moment and consider your surroundings. You know where you are and you know how you got there. You occupy a space that has a name and you can look around and find ways to identify and describe it.

This is the starting line for any action plan—knowing where you are. Simply put, you have to know where you are in order to launch out and go somewhere else.

It's important to start any planning effort with discovery. Gathering new facts, data and other information about your church and community is the best way to clearly assess the current situation and plot the best course forward.



Growth Step 1

Discovery on three levels is a crucial first step in developing a ministry action plan. Gather information in three ways:

- **Internal Trends** – Review church health indicators to reveal where ministry is working and where it isn't.
- **Community Research** – Learn more about your community.
- **Outreach Focus** – Identify the church's outreach focus—your target.



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Research internal ministry trends and learn more about your community.

- Internal Trends
- Community Research
- Outreach Focus



Internal Trends

Research

Businesses conduct market research because it's important to understand consumers who might buy their product. Churches don't actually "sell" a product the way business do, but we do provide ministries to meet peoples' needs—spiritual, material, emotional and more. And understanding more about the who, what, when and where of ministry can open new doors for meeting the needs around us.

Research helps you know precisely where your church is at this moment. It helps you answer important questions about the people who populate your church:

- What is the age breakdown in your church?
- How many families with children are there?
- Is the average age of your church on the rise? Or is it falling?
- What specific needs do people have?
- How can the church meet them?

Questions like these tell you who your church has reached in the past and who you are reaching now. It indicates that you're doing a good job ministering to many people in your church and community. But you might discover that something—or someone—is being missed.

Internal Situation Analysis

An internal situation analysis is comprised of numerical data measuring various church health indicators over a defined period (usually 5, 10 or 15 years). The numbers show where growth is occurring and where needs are being met, where there's room for improvement, and where church health is indicated (or not). An internal situation analysis can include traditional measures and data such as:

- **Morning Worship Service**
 - Campuses Average Attendance
 - Traditional | Blended | Contemporary Services Average Attendance
- **Additions**
- **Baptisms**
 - Annual Total | Under Age 6 | Ages 6-8 | Ages 9-11 | Ages 12-17 | Ages 18-29 | Ages 30-59 | Age 60 and Over



- **Groups**
 - Unique Attenders | Unique Monthly Groups Attenders
 - Annual Average | Unique Weekly Groups Attendance
 - Sunday Groups | Home Groups Attendance
 - College | Young Adult (22-39) | Median Adult (40-59) | Senior Adult (60+) Average Attendance
- **Age Divisions**
 - Preschool | Children | Students Average Attendance
 - Children's Summer Outreach (VBS or Backyard Kids Clubs)
 - Student D-Now | Summer Camp Attendance
 - Women's Ministry | Men's Ministry Group or Event Attendance
- **Missions Mobilization**
 - Local Ministries Participation | Global Missions Participation
- **Worship Ministry**
 - Praise Band | Orchestra Average Attendance
 - Vocal Team | Choir Average Attendance
 - Tech | Media | Production Volunteers
- **Total Membership**
 - Campuses
 - Total Members | Resident Members
- **Income**
 - Total Receipts | Missions Giving | Capital Campaign Giving
 - Per Capita Giving (total receipts divided by average Sunday School or morning worship service attendance)

There may be other measures that better represent your specific church or quantify your ministry paradigm. The point is this: compile data and gather information on the journey your church has traveled and where it is right now. Map the trend lines over a period of 10 or 15 years so you can visualize areas of strength and areas of opportunity.

Complete the Internal Trends Worksheet after this section.



Download the Internal Trends Worksheet at:
https://ministryactionplans.com/doc/internal_trends_worksheet.xlsx



Assessment & Analysis

Once you've compiled the data, it is time for assessment and analysis:

- What does the data indicate?
- What describes the state of the church? Growing? Plateaued? Declining?
- Does the church show signs of health?
- How many people were baptized each year?
- What is the baptism ratio (average worship attendance divided by number of baptisms)?
On average, how many church members did it take to baptize one person? Does this number seem unreasonably high?
- What are the age-graded average attendance patterns in Sunday School or small groups?
- What is the attendance pattern in average morning worship attendance?
- And many other possible questions...

Analysis may take some time and effort. It may also require a brainstorming session of your ministry staff team and other church leaders. Pray over the results of your research. Examine the numerical data closely and stay true to what it tells you about your current situation.

Assessment Tool

Use the Internal Trends Assessment after this section to kick start the discovery process.



Download the Internal Trends Assessment at:

https://ministryactionplans.com/worksheets/internal_trends_assessment.docx



MINISTRY
ACTION PLANS

Internal Trends Worksheet

	Worship Average Attendance	Worship Services % Change	Resident Members	Total Members	Other Additions	Baptism Overview							
						< 6	6-8	9-11	12-17	18-29	30-59	60+	Total
2016													
2017													
2018													
2019													
2020													
2021													
2022													
2023													
2024													
2025													
2026													
2027													
2028													
2029													
2030													

	VBS Average Attendance	Music Ministry Enrollment	Women's Ministry Enrollment	Men's Ministry Enrollment	Mission Trip Participants
2016					
2017					
2018					
2019					
2020					
2021					
2022					
2023					
2024					
2025					
2026					
2027					
2028					
2029					
2030					



	Bible Fellowships Average Attendance								Bible F'ships % Change
	Preschool	Children	Students	Adults 18-24	Adults 25-34	Adults 35-54	Adults 55+	Average Attendance	
2016									
2017									
2018									
2019									
2020									
2021									
2022									
2023									
2024									
2025									
2026									
2027									
2028									
2029									
2030									

	Bible Fellowships Enrollment							
	Preschool	Children	Students	Adults 18-24	Adults 25-34	Adults 35-54	Adults 55+	Total Enrollment
2016								
2017								
2018								
2019								
2020								
2021								
2022								
2023								
2024								
2025								
2026								
2027								
2028								
2029								
2030								

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Internal Trends Assessment	
Classify Your Church's Current Growth Pattern	<input type="checkbox"/> Explosive Growth <input type="checkbox"/> Steady Growth <input type="checkbox"/> Plateaued—Flat Attendance <input type="checkbox"/> Declining—Falling Attendance
Describe How Church Members Perceive Your Church	
Give Your Best Guess of Your Church's Median Age	
Is Your Church a Mirror of Its Community?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Is Your Church Ready to Meet Community Needs?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Is Your Church Ready to Make Ministry Adjustments?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Give Approximate Baptisms Last Year	
Describe the First-Time Guest Experience	<input type="checkbox"/> <u>Expressway</u> —Seamless Experience <input type="checkbox"/> <u>City Street</u> —Roadblocks and Potholes <input type="checkbox"/> <u>Country Road</u> —50/50 Chance They'll Make It <input type="checkbox"/> <u>Mountain Trail</u> —Lots of Bumps with Few Road Signs <input type="checkbox"/> <u>Overgrown Path</u> —They'll Never Make It
Rate Your Church's Outreach Attitude	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Evangelistic <input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat Evangelistic <input type="checkbox"/> Rarely Evangelistic <input type="checkbox"/> Not Evangelistic
Did You Conduct Evangelism Training Last Year?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Does Your Church Have an Active Outreach Follow Up Plan?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No

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Give Approximate Average Small Groups Attendance Last Year	
How Many Small Groups Were Started Last Year?	
Does Your Church Have Regular Teacher-Leader Meetings?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Do New Members Find Places of Service Easily?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
What % of Members Became Leaders in the Last 5 Years?	
Does Your Church Emphasize Praying for Missions?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
What % of Budget Receipts Are Devoted to Missions?	
Give Approximate # of Mission Trip Participants Last Year	
Give Approximate AM Worship Attendance Last Year	
What Worship Style Best Describes Your Church?	<input type="checkbox"/> Liturgical <input type="checkbox"/> Traditional <input type="checkbox"/> Blended <input type="checkbox"/> Innovative
Does Your Worship Style Connect with Your Community?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Describe Your Church in 15 Words or Less	

[illegible]



Community Research

Understanding Your Community

While internal trends provide a snapshot of ministry to people inside the walls of the church, community research starts the process of understanding your community. It's true that you already understand a great deal about your mission field. Your ministry has been contextualized over time, born out of living, serving and ministering to diverse people in your area. This new effort to gather information about your community will confirm things you already know and reveal new insights that might have gone unnoticed.

The purpose in learning more is not to remake your church in the image of your environment, but rather to develop ministry in ways that connect with real and felt needs of local residents.

Let's agree that effective ministry always meets a need—material, relational, emotional, recreational, physical and spiritual. Community research is simply a tool to help you understand more clearly what those needs are.

Preliminary Research

To start with, you need to know more about the environment in which you minister and serve—what we call exploratory or preliminary research. Basic facts about population, income, education and family size are the first things you need to know. Typical preliminary research might include:

- Total Population
- Median Age
- Age Categories
- Racial Classification
- Average Household Size
- Household Types
- Housing Types
- Educational Attainment
- Marital Status
- Median Household Income
- Occupation
- Median Home Value

If you minister in the United States, a good place to gather this information (also called secondary data) is from the U.S. Census Bureau. Try it out now by searching data.census.gov for general demographic information for your zip code.



Assessment & Analysis

Once you've compiled preliminary research, it's time for analysis. Consider these questions:

- What does the data indicate?
- What is the median age of your community? Is there a match between the church and community median ages?
- What is the average family size? Does this indicate anything for church ministries?
- What does the educational attainment in your community mean for church ministries?
- What occupations are typical for your community? What ministries are most likely to connect with people who live and work in your community?
- What proportion of the population falls into specific age categories? How many preschoolers are there? How many children? How many students? How many senior adults?
- What is the average income? What does income say about the felt needs of people in your community? (Consider Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs here)
- And many other possible questions...

Assessment Tool

Examine the external data closely and strive to learn something new about your community by completing the Community Research Assessment on the next page.



Download the Community Research Assessment at:

https://ministryactionplans.com/worksheets/community_research_assessment.docx

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Community Research Assessment	
In General, Describe Your Community	<input type="checkbox"/> <u>Good Soil</u> —Very Receptive <input type="checkbox"/> <u>Rocky Soil</u> —Often Receptive <input type="checkbox"/> <u>Thorny Soil</u> —Somewhat Receptive <input type="checkbox"/> <u>Hard Soil</u> —Not Receptive
Describe How Your Community Perceives Your Church	
Is This Perception in Line with Your Expectations?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
If No, How Can You Modify Community Perceptions?	
Classify Community Population Trends	<input type="checkbox"/> Rapid Growth <input type="checkbox"/> Steady Growth <input type="checkbox"/> Flat <input type="checkbox"/> Declining
How Does This Trend Impact the Church's Ministry?	
Do Approximate Church & Community Median Ages Match?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No

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If No, What Quick Ideas Can Bridge the Gap?	
What Are the Fastest-Growing Community Age Categories?	<input type="checkbox"/> Preschoolers/Children <input type="checkbox"/> Students—Middle & High School <input type="checkbox"/> Young Adults (Ages 18-39) <input type="checkbox"/> Median Adults (Ages 40-54) <input type="checkbox"/> Meridian Adults (Ages 55-69) <input type="checkbox"/> Senior Adults (Ages 70+)
Is Your Church Equipped to Reach These Age Groups?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Classify Your Overall Ministry to Families	<input type="checkbox"/> Highly Effective <input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat Effective <input type="checkbox"/> Rarely Effective <input type="checkbox"/> Not Effective
Is Ministry to Community Divorced People Needed?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Do You Provide Ministry to Divorced People?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Is Ministry to Community Young Adults Needed?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Do You Provide Ministry to Young Adults?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Do Approximate Church & Community Education Levels Match?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
If No, What Quick Ideas Can Bridge the Communication Gap?	

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Do Approximate Church & Community Income Levels Match?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
If No, What Quick Ideas Can Bridge the Affinity Gap?	
Do Approximate Church & Community Occupational Profiles Match?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
If No, What Quick Ideas Can Bridge the Occupational Gap?	



Research Examples

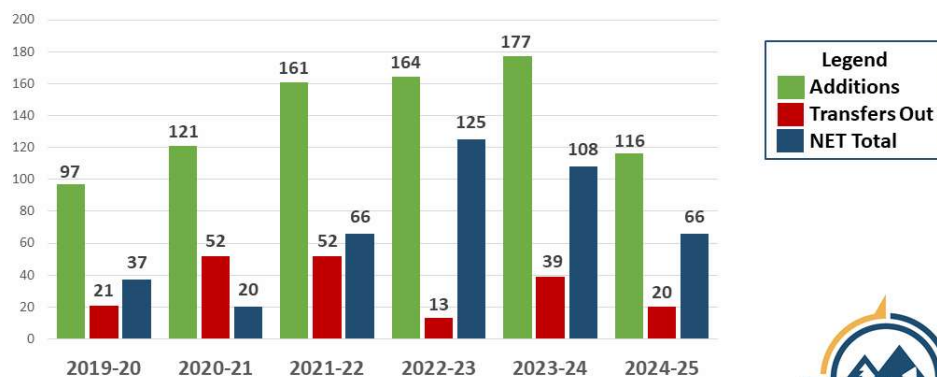
Internal Trends Examples

Internal Trends

Where are we?
Where have we been?

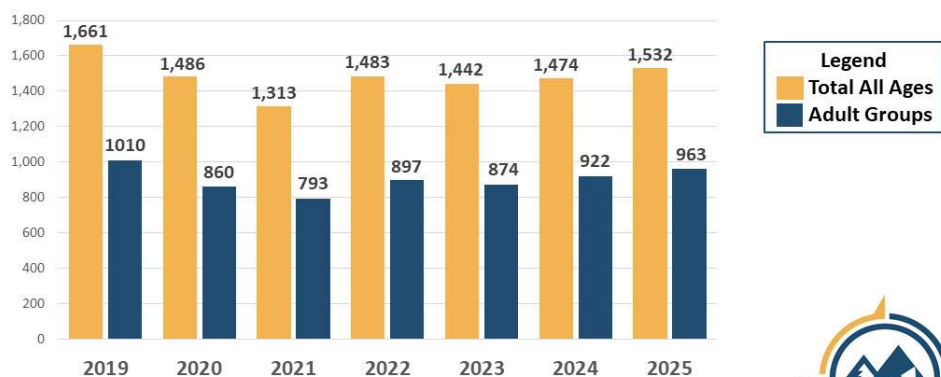


Membership Statistics (Church Year)

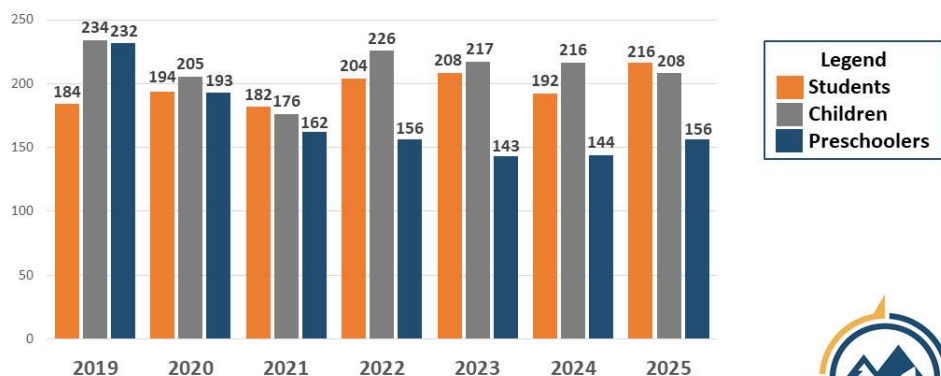




Unique Monthly LIFE Group Attenders

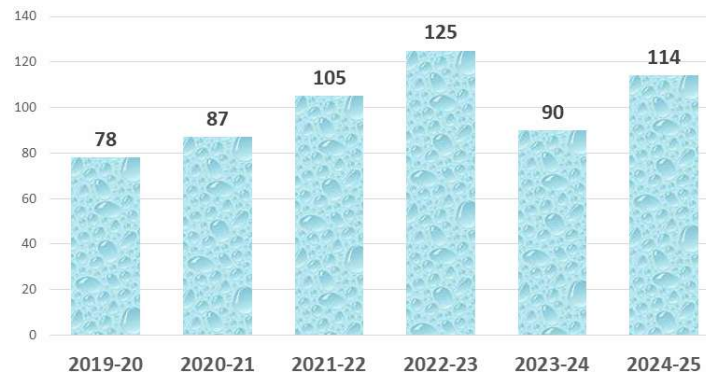


Annual NextGen Average Attendance

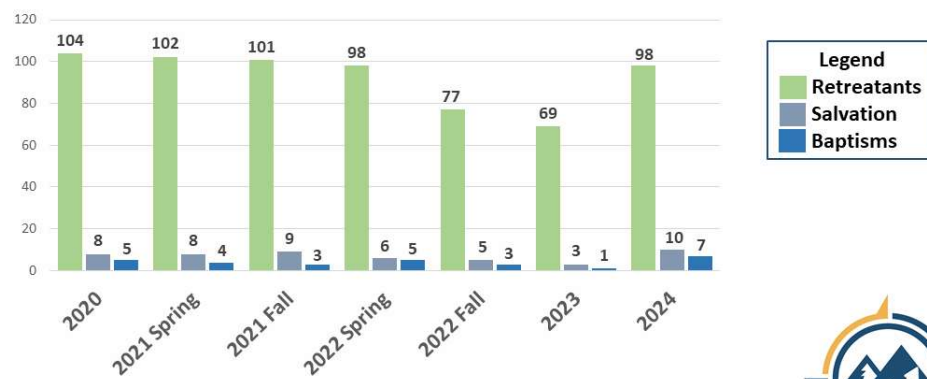




Annual Baptisms (Church Year)

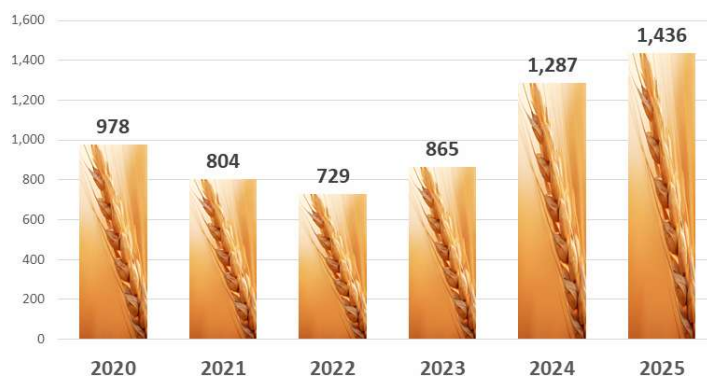


Men's Spiritual Renewal Retreats

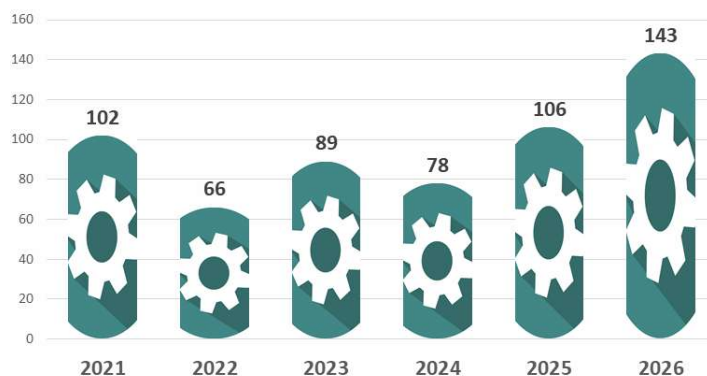




Annual Gospel Conversations

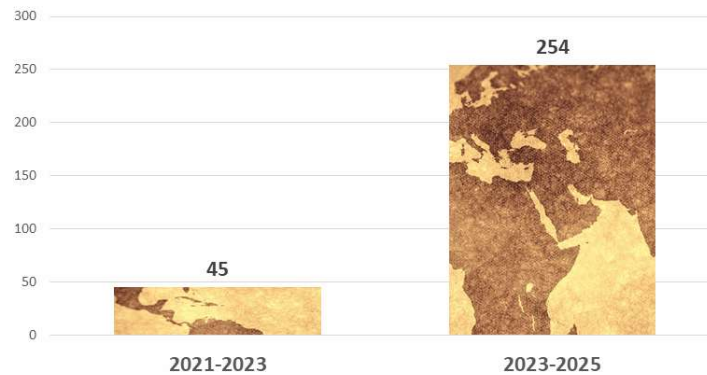


Annual D-Group Participants

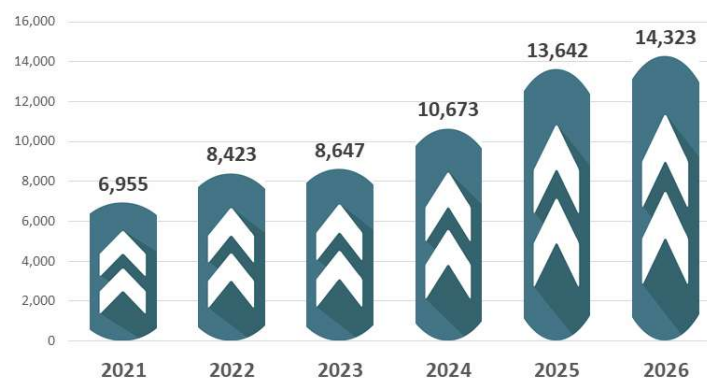




People Mobilized on Mission Trips

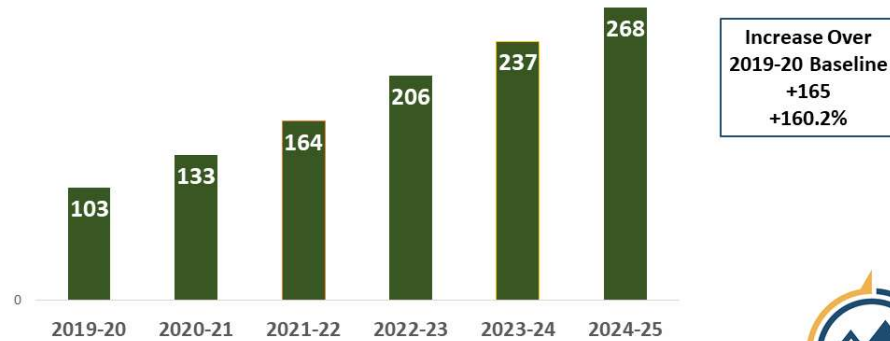


Annual Worship Invites

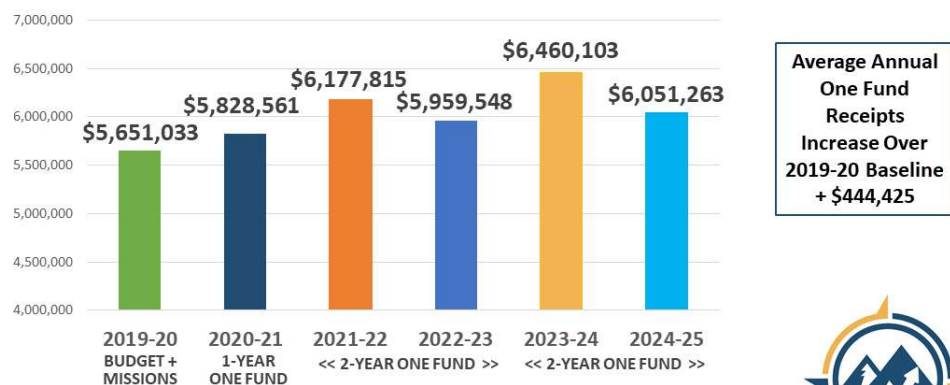




Calhoun Campus Attendance (Church Year)

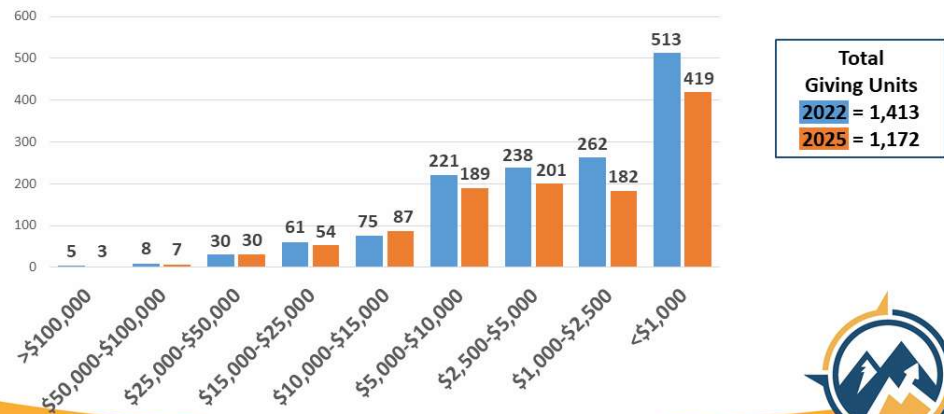


Total See To It Fund Receipts





2022 vs. 2025 Giving Units Comparison





Community Research Examples

Community Research

Who lives in our community?
What defines them?

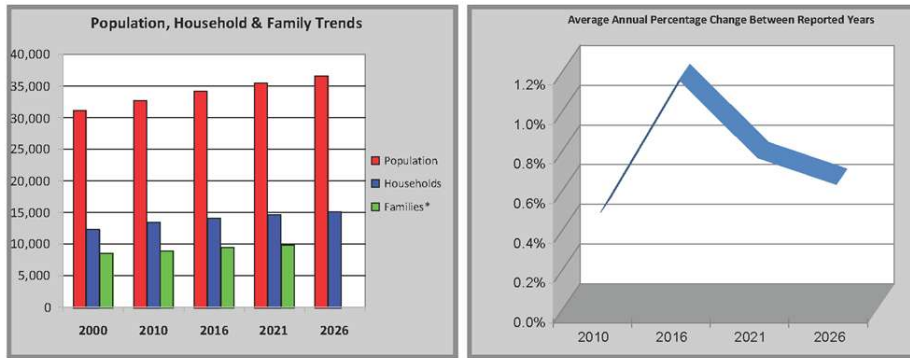


The Study Area: Zip Code 71291

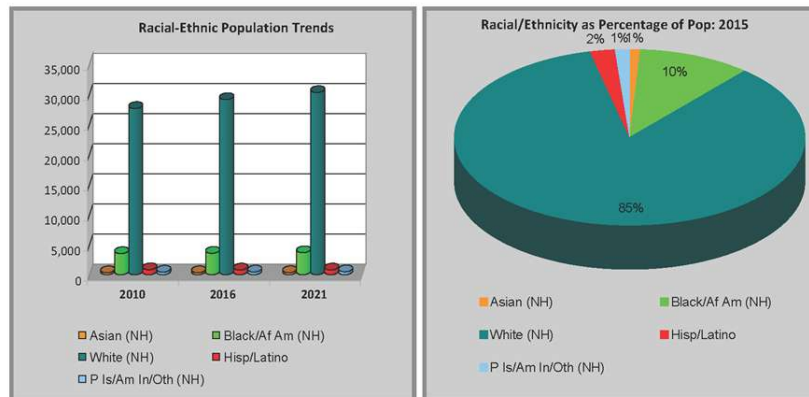




Population & Household Trends

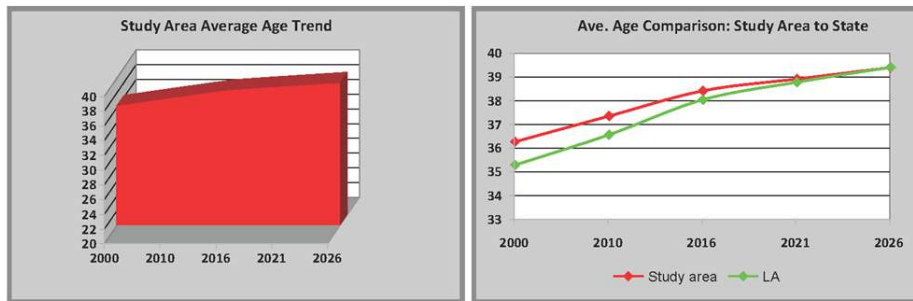


Racial-Ethnic Trends

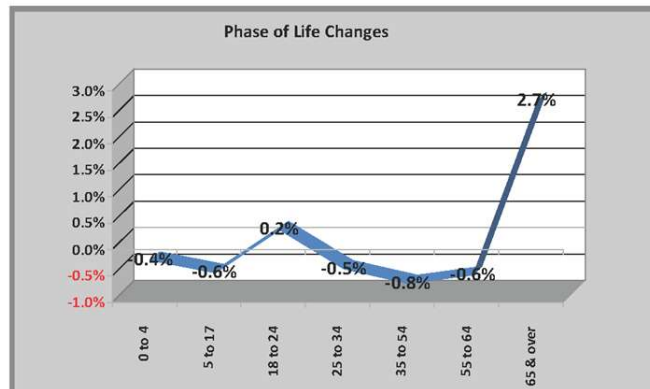




Age Trends

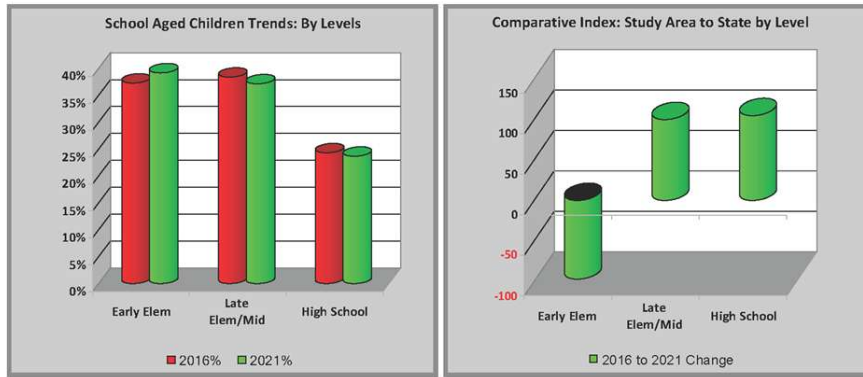


Age Trends

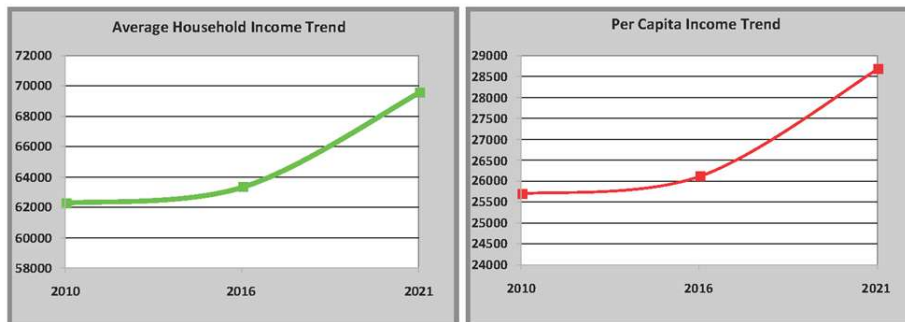




School-Aged Children Trends

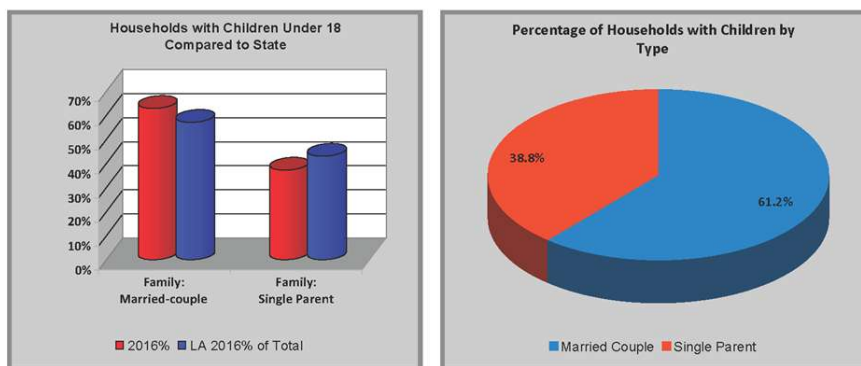


Household & Family Income Trends

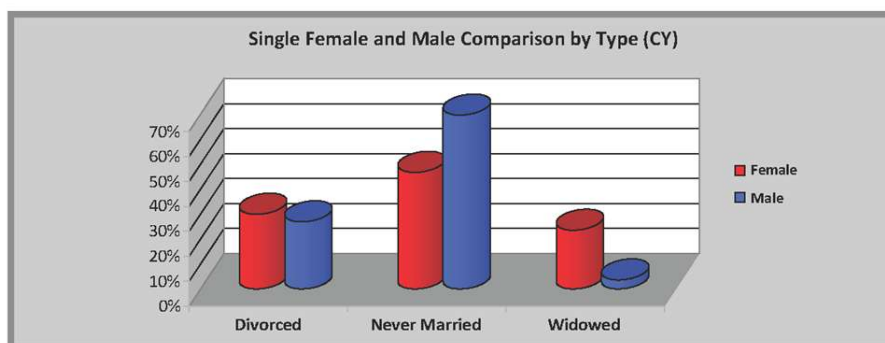




Households & Children Trends

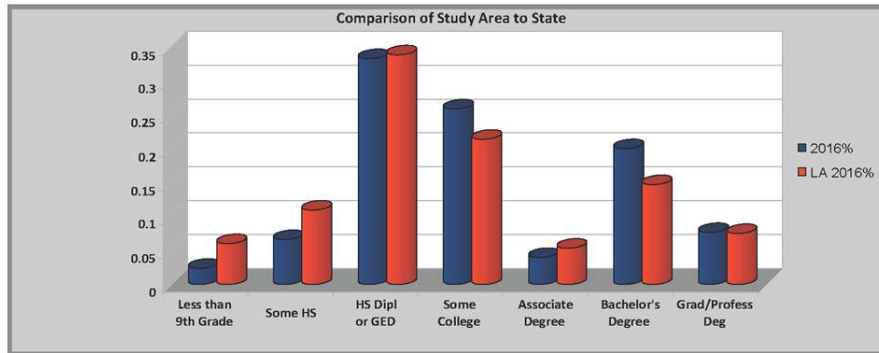


Marital Status Trends

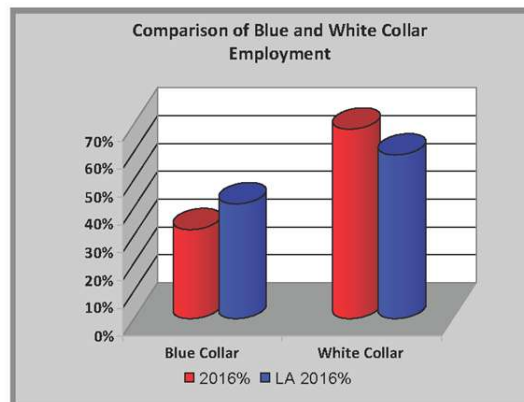




Adult Educational Attainment



Population by Employment





MOSAIC Segments

	2016	2016%	State %	Comp Index	Relative to the LA State Ave.
Mosaic Segments					
J34 Autumn Years - Aging in Place	1,325	10.9%	3.5%	314	Well above the state average
Q64 Golden Year Guardians - Town Elders	1,019	8.4%	4.9%	172	Well above the state average
O51 Singles and Starters - Digital Dependents	1,004	8.3%	3.6%	229	Well above the state average
O55 Singles and Starters - Family Troopers	846	7.0%	1.9%	364	Well above the state average
D15 Suburban Style - Sports Utility Families	790	6.5%	2.7%	240	Well above the state average
C11 Booming with Confidence - Aging of Aquarius	598	4.9%	3.4%	143	Well above the state average
K40 Significant Singles - Bohemian Groove	497	4.1%	1.0%	391	Well above the state average
N48 Pastoral Pride - Rural Southern Bliss	481	4.0%	9.3%	43	Well below the state average
C14 Booming with Confidence - Boomers and Boomerangs	478	3.9%	1.1%	358	Well above the state average



Charitable Giving Practices

	Hholds	% of HH	Index	Interpretation
Charitable Contributions Last Yr: \$200 Or More				
Health-\$200 Or More	673	4.8%	165	Well above the state ave.
Social Services/Welfare-\$200 Or More	688	4.9%	115	Somewhat above the state ave.
Education-\$200 Or More	463	3.3%	108	About average for the state.
Other-\$200 Or More	590	4.2%	100	About average for the state.
Private Foundation-\$200 Or More	316	2.2%	98	About average for the state.
Religious-\$200 Or More	3,039	21.6%	97	About average for the state.
Public Television-\$200 Or More	25	0.2%	64	Somewhat below the state ave.
Public Radio-\$200 Or More	32	0.2%	60	Well below the state ave.
Environmental-\$200 Or More	67	0.5%	58	Well below the state ave.
Political Organization-\$200 Or More	55	0.4%	56	Well below the state ave.





Religious Program or Ministry Preferences

	Study Area		US Average		Comparative Index	
	Modestly Important	Very Important	Modestly Important	Very Important	Modestly Important	Very Important
Religious/Spiritual Programs	0.0%	0.0%	34.2%	19.0%	0	0
Alternative spiritual practices (meditation, yoga, etc.)	0.0%	0.0%	28.2%	8.0%	0	0
Bible or Scripture study/prayer groups	0.0%	0.0%	32.5%	21.6%	0	0
Christian education for children	0.0%	0.0%	27.8%	22.0%	0	0
Contemporary worship services	0.0%	0.0%	40.2%	17.0%	0	0
Spiritual discussion groups	0.0%	0.0%	40.1%	15.0%	0	0
Traditional worship services	0.0%	0.0%	36.8%	30.3%	0	0
Community Activities or Cultural Programs	0.0%	0.0%	42.3%	16.6%	0	0
Cultural programs (music, drama, art)	0.0%	0.0%	45.2%	12.8%	0	0
Holiday programs/activities	0.0%	0.0%	49.0%	18.0%	0	0
Seniors/retiree activities	0.0%	0.0%	41.8%	16.7%	0	0
Youth social activities	0.0%	0.0%	33.0%	18.8%	0	0



Outreach Focus

Gifted for Outreach

Gathering information about your church and community has two results. First, you confirm what you already knew or suspected. Second, you discover something that you didn't know. Often, a new discovery leads to new insights and understanding. That leads you to make ministry and strategy changes in the interest of more effectively meeting the needs of people God has called you to reach.

Knowing where you stand is the obvious result of internal research, but what's the result of external research? Simply put, the result is a clear outreach focus—the target group or segments of people God is calling your church to reach. Your church is uniquely gifted to reach segments of its community in at least four ways:

- **Location** – God planted your church in a community that needs to hear the gospel.
- **Culture** – He calls you to be salt and light among the people with whom you share cultural affinity and identity.
- **Resources** – He has equipped your church with the structural, organizational and relational resources to reach people.
- **Mission** – God has given your church a mission to go, baptize, teach and disciple your community.

Identifying Key Community Segments

Multiple clusters of people comprise any community or geographic area. The people that form each segment are uniquely defined by different lifestyle, demographic and psychographic characteristics. They all need to hear the gospel, and we are commissioned to share with our entire community. But location, culture, resources and mission mean that every church is uniquely gifted for an outreach focus.

A church can't reach everyone. That's why choosing specific segments as your outreach focus and target is important. It allows your church to formulate specific ministries that meet the specific needs of community segments. Different clusters (with different lifestyle and psychographic characteristics) require different ministries and strategies designed to meet their real needs and lead them to Christ.

Many classification schemes for segmentation exist. Each system is slightly different, but they all have the same result. They separate a defined population—city, town or region—into distinct, identifiable groups with specific lifestyle and psychographic characteristics.

Two segmentation systems are recommended here:





- **PRIZM Premier** – PRIZM Premier is a segmentation system from Claritas that harness both household and geographic level data. The 68 segments are arranged in two parts—social groups and lifestage groups. Social groups are classified by three levels of affluence (low, moderate and high) and by four levels of urbanization (urban, 2nd city, suburban and town and rural). Lifestage groups are classified by the same three levels of affluence and by three categories of age-and-children combinations (younger years, family life and mature years).
- **MOSAIC** – MOSAIC is a geodemographic segmentation system developed by Experian and marketed in over twenty countries worldwide. Read more about MOSAIC methodology here. The 71 MOSAIC clusters are used by The Leavell Center for Evangelism and Church Growth at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.

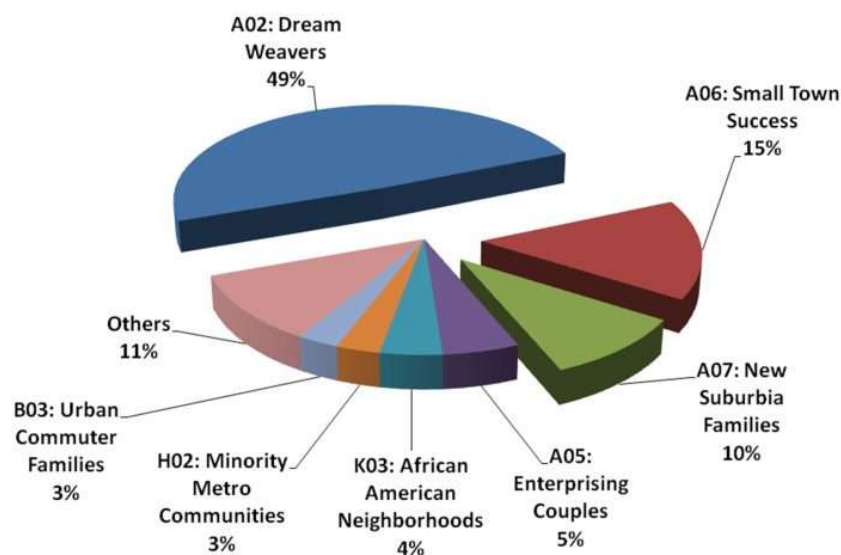
Let's give this a try! Follow this link and enter a U.S. zip code to see what your community's segmentation profile looks like: <https://claritas360.claritas.com/mybestsegments/#zipLookup>.

A PRIZM Premier profile illustrates the power and ministry uses of segmentation data.

Sample Outreach Focus

Segmentation offers a snapshot of the different segments of people who lives in your community. People in these groups share lifestyle and psychographic characteristics—that is, they behave in similar ways, enjoy doing similar things, have similar values, buy similar things and more. Let's take a look at a segmentation pie chart for a sample zip code using the MOSAIC system:

SAMPLE ZIP CODE MOSAIC LIFESTYLE SEGMENTS





Zip Code 38017 includes at least seven different MOSAIC segments of people. You can also see that the bulk of the population falls into three segments—Dream Weavers, Small Town Success and New Suburbia Families. Taken together, those three groups comprise 74% of the population. Once you view a community with its clusters or segments, you can more clearly see the people God is calling you to reach.

In the above example, although the zip code contains seven clusters, it makes sense to zero in on the three largest groups that comprise 74% of the population—almost 30,000 people in our sample zip code. Three segments—Dream Weavers, Small Town Success and New Suburbia Families—comprise a natural outreach focus in this example.

Key Segments

Is the church's outreach focus (comprised of certain key segments) in plain view? What does the segmentation profile say about your community? What does it say about ministry methods needed to reach them?

The challenge is to choose specific segments as your outreach focus and then formulate specific ministries to meet the specific needs of those segments.

View a PRIZM Premier Segments Profile for your community at this link:
<https://claritas360.claritas.com/mybestsegments/#zipLookup>

Worksheet Tool

Review community segments and clarify your outreach focus with the worksheet tool on the next page.



Download the Outreach Focus Worksheet at:

https://ministryactionplans.com/worksheets/outreach_focus_worksheet.docx

1 | Discover > Outreach Focus

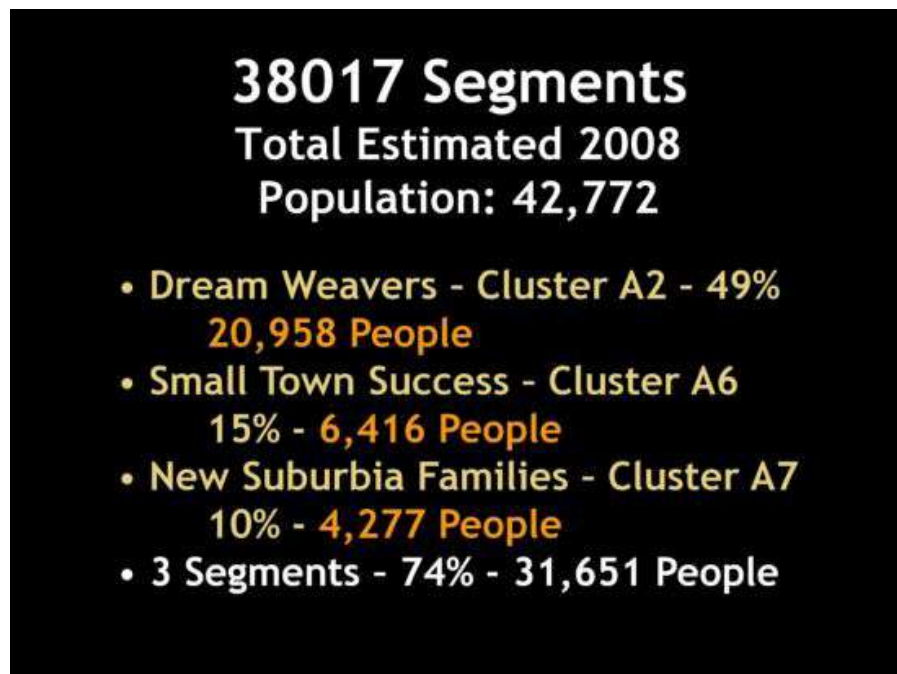
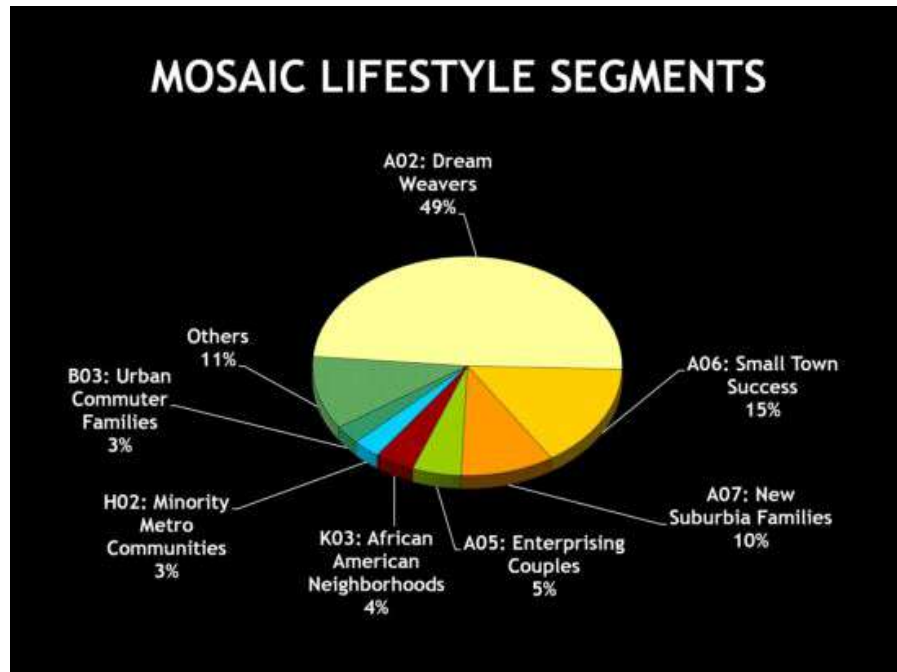
Outreach Focus Worksheet	
Input Your Church's Mission Statement	
Is Your Church a Mirror of Its Community?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Is Your Church Ready to Meet Community Needs?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Is Your Church Ready to Make Ministry Adjustments?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
What Is Your Community's Approximate Total Population?	
LIST TOP 5 SEGMENTS - Segment #1 & 1-Word Descriptor	
Segment #2 & 1-Word Descriptor	
Segment #3 & 1-Word Descriptor	
Segment #4 & 1-Word Descriptor	
Segment #5 & 1-Word Descriptor	
Give Approximate % That Falls in the Top 3-5 Segments	
Quantify the Number of People This % Represents	

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What Segments Is Your Church Positioned to Reach NOW?	<input type="checkbox"/> All 5 Segments <input type="checkbox"/> 3-4 Segments <input type="checkbox"/> 1-2 Segments <input type="checkbox"/> None
Name the Segments You Are Ready to Reach NOW	
Name the Segments You Could Reach with Minimal Changes	
What Ideas Might Work for These Segments?	
What Do You Do NOW That Will Reach Them?	
What Do You Need to START Doing to Reach Them?	
What Do You Need to STOP Doing to Reach Them?	



Outreach Focus Examples





Dream Weavers

Zip Code 38017 - 49%
20,958 People

- Median Home Value - \$290,000
- Median Income - \$113,000
- White, married with children with more than half dual-income households
- Height of their careers and carrying lots of overhead
- Mainstream in recreational, media and travel habits

Small Town Success

Zip Code 38017 - 15%
6,416 People

- Median Home Value - \$175,000
- Median Income - \$75,000
- 40% have children at home
- Median Age is 39, though a third are 50+
- Stretch budgets with warehouse and catalog shopping
- Active volunteers in local politics, school and community events



New Suburbia Families

Zip Code 38017 - 10%

4,277 People

- Median Home Value - \$185,000
- Median Income - \$75,000
- Married and raising young families
- Median age is 31
- Dual-income households represent 60%
- Busy lifestyles often mean fast-food meals
- Many commute to careers in retail, health, education and finance



Listen to Learn

Listening vs. Hearing

If you've been burned by negative, critical comments—solicited and unsolicited—over the years, it can be difficult to open yourself up to someone else's feedback. It may be that a difficult personality and a precarious ministry situation make listening difficult. Regardless, don't let your pride prevent you from listening to what other voices have to say.

People are increasingly empowered to express their opinion. They do it when they make an online purchase. They do it on social media. They do it in countless other ways through web forums, blogs, surveys and feedback forms. The fact is we can learn from members, volunteers and key leaders in our congregation. Great ideas, creativity and innovation often come from the bottom up.

Nilofer Merchant's *The New How* concludes that "we need to let people think and create strategy everywhere." That's right on target. Surveys, focus groups, interviews and observation are all powerful ways to start that process in your church.

Surveys

Create surveys to discover needs, opportunities, strengths and weaknesses in your church and community. Surveys are a great way to get feedback from large groups of people and learn more about the effectiveness of your church's evangelism, discipleship, ministry, missions and worship efforts.

Surveys contain two kinds of questions:

- **Open-End Questions** – Questions where the respondent is free to answer in his or her own words. Compile the answers and don't forget to edit or remove names and inappropriate comments.
- **Closed-End Questions** – Questions where possible answers are supplied (yes or no, multiple choice or agree/disagree). Quantify results for each question in a spreadsheet or database.

Surveys should only ask necessary information. Brevity is the key to getting people to complete surveys. It's also important not to communicate an agenda through the general tone, bias, ambiguity or theme of survey questions. Just ask simple questions without an expectation of specific results. Online survey tools include:

- SurveyMonkey.com
- SurveyGizmo.com
- Constant Contact



Take a quick look at some sample ministry surveys:



Download a Sample Young Families Survey at:
https://ministryactionplans.com/doc/young_families_survey.pdf



Download a Sample Adults 55+ Survey at:
https://ministryactionplans.com/doc/mature_families_survey.pdf



Download Sample Survey Results at:
https://ministryactionplans.com/doc/survey_results.pdf

Focus Groups

Bring together a focus group to learn more about church and community needs. Think carefully about the composition of any focus group. Include key leaders, influencers and long-time volunteers, but also consider new members, less involved members and critical thinkers.

Pull groups together for an opening meal or refreshments to convey informality. Then communicate a general purpose, such as learning more about the best ways to reach a school or neighborhood. Focus groups are largely open ended. Ask questions that require extended (not yes and no) answers as a way to encourage discussion and honest communication. Choose an objective, unbiased facilitator who has some distance from the focus group's topic or issue at hand.

Create focus groups to learn more about:

- **Age Division Ministry Perceptions** – What is our preschool ministry doing well? What can we improve on? What is our student ministry doing well? What can we improve on?
- **Community Outreach Focus Points** – Is there a school we need to reach? Is there a neighborhood we need to reach?
- **Facilities** – What can we do to improve our facilities? For preschool families? For children's families? For student families? For senior adults?
- **First Impressions** – How can we better assimilate guests and new members? What's working and what isn't?
- **Small Groups** – How can we grow our small groups? What new ideas do we need to consider?
- **Recreation** – How can our recreation ministry be used more effectively for outreach?
- **New Ministry Initiatives** – Is there a need for something new? What should this new ministry look like? Who? What? When? Where?



Interviews & Observation

Sometimes it helps to get away. Church staff teams face the daily grind of ministry with a view of church and community that's reinforced by the people we know. That's not necessarily a bad thing, but fresh perspectives and new ideas can sometimes lead to new insights and thinking about our situation, context and ministry methods.

Taking a field trip to visit other churches is one of the most useful interview and observation approaches. Visit another ministry team to learn more about how they are accomplishing the same tasks you are charged with doing. The give and take of two teams, or even two pastors, in dialogue can reap incredible strategy and planning dividends!

Seek out other churches of similar size and philosophy but also look for ministries at the next level. They might be larger churches with a similar vision for their church and community. Or it might be a staff team with some innovative approach to ministry, staff, facilities or something else.

Meet with a person or a group and then record your reflections and thoughts afterwards. What does the interview or observation say to ministry in your church and community?

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