Lesson Plan & Study Guide

Understanding Your Community

Part One: What Kind of Community Are We In?

Working with Jesus

iFOLLOW

The iFollow Discipleship Series

Seventh-day Adventist Church

Vervent

Center for Creative Ministry

Version 1.0 - 12/8/10

About the iFollow Discipleship Series
Pastor's Edition

Categories

The iFollow Discipleship Series is designed to be used in congregations to assist people in their pursuit of God. This assumes that individuals are in unique places in their journey and there is no perfect set of lessons that everyone must complete to become a disciple—in fact discipleship is an eternal journey. Therefore the iFollow curriculum is a menu of milestones that an individual, small group, or even an entire church can choose from. The lessons can be placed in three general categories: **Meeting with Jesus** (does not assume a commitment to Jesus Christ); **Walking with Jesus** (assumes an acceptance of Jesus Christ); and **Working with Jesus** (assumes a desire to serve Jesus Christ).

Components

Each lesson has a presenter's manuscript which can be read word for word, but will be stronger if the presenter puts it in his/her own words and uses personal illustrations. The graphic slides can be played directly from the Pastor's DVD or customized and played from a computer. There are also several group activities and discussion questions to choose from as well as printable student handouts.

Usage

The lessons are designed to be used in small groups, pastor's Bible classes, prayer meetings, seminars, retreats, training sessions, discussion groups, and some lessons may be appropriate sermon outlines.

Credits

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Understanding Your Community, Part One: What Kind of Community Are We In?

This is the first in a series of six units designed to provide basic training in community assessment.

Learning Objectives

1. Discover basic facts about the local community as a context for mission and ministry
2. Study a map of the metropolitan area or rural region to place the local community in its larger context
3. Understand the type of community the church is located in
4. Participate in a simple observation exercise to get acquainted with the community

Content Outline

1. The process of urbanization is the most powerful social dynamic of the last 150 years in North America
2. Map study exercise
3. Typology of local communities
4. Discussion: What type of community is this church located in? What does that mean for its ministry to the community?
5. Windshield survey exercise
6. Discussion: What can we see that tells us something about the people who live in this community and their needs?

Background Material for the Presenter

What kind of community is our church located in? This may be a surprising question for you. Seventh-day Adventists move a lot more often than the general population. An Adventist pastor averages only a few years in each assignment and research has shown

that Adventist members tend to be highly mobile. (Dudley, *et al*.) As a result, most Adventists do not put down very deep roots in a community.

This is consistent with a faith that affirms that "this world is not our home" and looks forward to "a city whose builder and maker is God." Yet it also means that you may not pay much attention to where they live. You may not understand the local culture, and you may not realize the extent to which you are seen as an "outsider," all of which is counterproductive to effectively pursuing the mission of the Church.

The first step in understanding your community is simply to identify the type of neighborhood or neighborhoods in your area. This is the key to interpreting demographics, discovering community needs and knowing the local culture.

The most common neighborhood typology is related to urbanization. Even if you are working in a community far from the nearest city, it is identified as "exurban"—literally, outside the urban area. Urbanization is the most important social dynamic of the last 150 years in North America and around the globe. In 1850, less than one in twenty Americans lived in urban communities. By 1950, four out of five were residents of urban neighborhoods.

Since 1950, the majority of the population has shifted from central cities to the suburbs of the major metropolitan areas. And "suburb" means precisely what it says; a little less urbanized, but still urban. This shift has not changed the fact that more than 80 percent of the population is still urbanized. Metropolitan areas contain most of the people that make up the focus of the mission Christ gave to the church.

You can learn to "read" a metropolitan area in much the same way that one can "read" the rings on the stump of a tree. Almost all metropolitan areas in North America are centered on a seaport or river port. This provided the original reason for the historic settlement hundreds of years ago that eventually grew to become a city. Most cities in North America were originally commercial centers focused on trading. Shipping facilities, banks, wholesale merchants, insurance companies and other businesses associated with commerce created the "downtown" which is at the heart of each metropolitan area.

Later, the cities became industrial centers, focused on production in foundries and factories which pulled many workers from the small towns and rural areas. Around the "downtown" of each metropolitan area, there is a donut-shaped area called the "inner city." Today, it is usually made up of industrial plants and decrepit housing. This was new development during the industrial revolution of the early 19th Century. Later most of the factories moved or closed down, and most of the workers moved away.

What is left in these neighborhoods are the poorest residents, including newly-arrived immigrants and ethnic minorities who may find it difficult to get housing elsewhere due both to cost and discrimination.

From the "inner city" layer on out to the municipal limits of the central city there are a number of neighborhoods once known as "street car suburbs." Toward the end of the 19th Century, in later stages of industrial development, as labor unions increased the pay of factory workers and street cars were built, many people moved further out to build larger homes. Townhouses and, later, large Victorian houses, interspersed with parks, characterize the earliest of these neighborhoods. Later neighborhoods were built during the first half of the 20th Century and reflect a variety of styles.

Beyond the city limits of the central city, there are rings of suburban towns. Almost all of these were built since the end of World War II in 1946, but many towns have a small central business section of older buildings. This was originally a small town, some distance from the city, and dates from a much earlier time than the post-World War II suburban development. Here there are lawns, trees and "green belts." Running through these neighborhoods are "belt" highways, freeway and expressways which circle the metropolitan area. Suburbs inside the beltway are the earlier developments, and those outside are the most recent.

Interspersed among the suburbs are office centers and industrial parks where the information industries of today and the future are based. These developments are sometimes called "edge city." The often look like the downtown of the central city with tall buildings and a central business district.

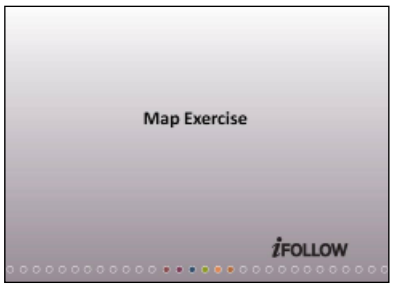
Beyond the metropolitan area is open country interspersed with small towns and villages. The rural regions between the metropolitan areas contain less than 20% of the population in North America, but the majority of the Adventist Church members and about two-thirds of Adventist congregations are located there. Adventists tend to be more oriented toward "the country" than are most of the people Christ has asked them to minister to.

Each of these donut-shaped rings of urban development and the surrounding rural region include several types of communities. When you identify what type of neighborhood you are working in, you will begin to be able to understand the demographics, development and dynamics of your community.

Map Exercise

In order to see where your community is located in this picture, you need to obtain a good map of your metropolitan area or rural region prior to the meeting. Look for a map that enables you to see both the larger context of your region and the

specific neighborhood(s) where your ministry is focused. Find a map that shows the boundaries of municipalities, counties and Zip Code areas (or Postal Codes in Canada), so that you can locate demographic data on your map.



Included in the resources section are a number of publishers of the best city and state/province road maps. At a major book store, especially superstores like Barnes and Noble and Borders, there is usually a good display of such maps. In addition, if you contact your city or county planning department, or regional planning association, you will find that these organizations create many kinds of maps, and will be willing to provide you with copies at modest cost.

Mark on the map the location of your church or ministry, and indicate the other Adventist churches, offices and institutions in the area. To define your ministry area, draw a circle on the map based on the distance from which people are most likely to commute for attendance at your outreach events. Using the location of your building as the center point, draw a circle based on the research finding that prospective members will commute only about 15 minutes to visit a church for the first few times. If your church is located in an urban neighborhood, this circle should be three miles out from the center. If your church is located in a suburban community, this circle should be nine miles out from the center. If your church is located in a small town or rural area, this circle should be 15 miles out from the center.

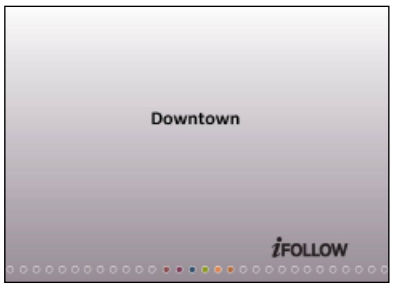
The easiest way to identify demographic data at a local level so that it is specific to a particular community is by using Zip Codes (in the U.S.; in Canada, they are called Postal Codes). Once you have drawn the circle on your map, carefully identify those Zip Code areas that are substantially within in the circle. Where the line runs through the middle of a Zip Code, this calls for some observation and judgment. For example, a Zip Code may cover a wide area, but only a small portion of it is built up with lots of streets on the map. It is likely that this is where most of the people located in the Zip Code actually live. If the built up portion is within your circle, even if it is the small portion of the total Zip Code area, then it is best to include that Zip Code in your list of identifiers for demographic data.

Go over the map with the group and identify each of the following kinds of communities or neighborhoods on the map.

Downtown

This is the central business district of the metropolitan area. It is sometimes also called “Midtown.” Banks and financial institutions, insurance companies, and

important government offices, including City Hall, are located here, as well as the headquarters of major corporations, large hotels, fine restaurants and department stores. The tallest skyscrapers in the metropolitan area are located in this type of neighborhood.



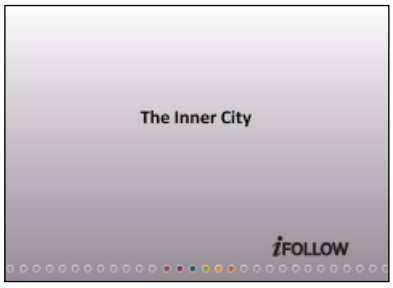
This is the seat of power in the region. The business executives and government officials who work out of these offices influence many aspects of life and provide leadership for the most powerful organizations throughout the metropolitan area and beyond. But, almost all of these people do not live in this neighborhood. They commute to their offices in downtown and then go to their homes in other communities.

In fact, downtown may have a massive population during the day and very few people living there at night. Except for a few of the elite who have apartments in those office buildings, people staying in the hotels and the homeless on the streets, the downtown area is usually empty once the work day is over.

There are a few churches located downtown. These are the old, First Church type of congregations, often Episcopal, Presbyterian, Methodist, or Catholic. These churches often have quite influential pastors, large financial endowments, many creative ministries and small attendance. I do not know of a single Seventh-day Adventist congregation of the "First Church" type currently located in the downtown of any major metropolitan area in North America.

The Inner City

A ring of neighborhoods near downtown, including old industrial facilities (some of them empty), run-down housing, and deteriorating stores and streets. It is often an area with many social problems, and middle class church members usually feel that "it is not safe." The very poor and newly-arrived immigrants live here because of economic barriers, and ethnic minorities often live in the inner city due to racial discrimination in housing and jobs elsewhere. Inner city neighborhoods usually have high density population and a very high level of human needs.



The problem of the inner city is created because corporations and private landowners practice "disinvestment." New technology makes industrial plants out-dated, and instead of installing the new technology in the old factories in the inner city, companies construct new facilities out in the suburbs or even rural locations. Then, they close down the old

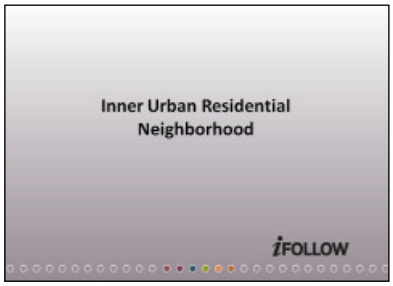
factories and the jobs leave the community forever. Most of the housing in the inner city is rental property, and the landlords follow the same policy as the employers. They quit making any improvements and then stop doing even routine maintenance, but they keep collecting rents as long as they can. Many landowners stop paying taxes on inner city property, and eventually abandon it. It falls to the city government to declare it unsafe for human habitation, board it up and eventually tear it down to reduce the fire hazard.

A few inner city neighborhoods experience "regentrification." Young, urban professionals move in, looking for homes near their downtown offices. They purchase dilapidated buildings at very low cost, gut the structures and reconstruct new condominiums and townhouses within the antique shells. As this begins to happen to several of the residential buildings, new businesses arrive in the neighborhood to provide up-scale restaurants, boutiques, dry cleaners and similar services. Soon developers see what is going on and begin to accelerate the process of redeveloping old buildings into upscale housing and commercial property. Pressure is brought on city government by those making major financial investments in the re-development of the community to provide a high level of police patrols to insure safety. Private security firms are widely visible. In this process the media may give attention to the neighborhood renaissance, but often the poor who used to live there are pushed aside with no place to go.

Inner city neighborhoods typically have several churches. Historically African American congregations, immigrant congregations that worship in languages other than English, and Methodist, Catholic, Baptist and other churches attempting to minister with the poor are found in the inner city. There are a number of Adventist congregations located in the inner city, most of them immigrant congregations or ethnic minority congregations.

Inner Urban Residential Neighborhood

Just outside the inner city are neighborhoods not quite as old where industrial facilities are not mixed so tightly with the residential areas. This inner urban ring of the metropolitan area will have some entirely industrial areas interspersed with many residential neighborhoods. Here the homes are not of the same vintage as the buildings in the inner city, and in better shape. More of the homes here are occupied by the owners and better maintained.



These neighborhoods are often made up largely of middle-aged and retired workers, both Blue Collar workers from industry, construction and city services,

and White Collar workers who serve as clerks and office secretaries in the downtown office buildings and the industrial enclaves. Many of the police officers and fire fighters in the central city live in these neighborhoods.

These neighborhoods usually have a definite ethnic or cultural identity. Some neighborhoods are known as Italian neighborhoods, others as Polish neighborhoods, etc. These are neighborhoods that immigrants moved out to around the end of the 19th Century and the early years of the 20th Century. One historian calls them "street car suburbs" because they were opened up as trolleys and subways were first built in major cities and first made commuting to work possible. These ethnic groups provide a strong sense of community, and fight to keep these neighborhoods clean, safe and vibrant.

Most of the needs in these neighborhoods are already being met by established community organizations. Adventists can make particular contributions with health screening and prevention programs due to the high percentage of middle-aged and older residents. In order to work in such a neighborhood is almost essential to have a church or Community Service Center long established in the neighborhood, or to work closely with an established organization. "Newcomers" are not quickly trusted, especially if they have a "strange" religion.

There are strong churches in these inner urban, residential neighborhoods. The church is often associated with the ethnic character of a particular neighborhood. If it is a Jewish neighborhood, it will have several synagogues, but few if any Christian churches. If it is an Italian or Polish or Irish neighborhood, the only church may be a Catholic parish. There are many Lutheran congregations in neighborhoods where immigrants originally arrived from Germany and Scandinavia, and Orthodox churches where there are Greeks, Russians, Serbs, etc. Few of these neighborhoods have an Adventist church. This is largely unreached territory.

Transitional Neighborhood

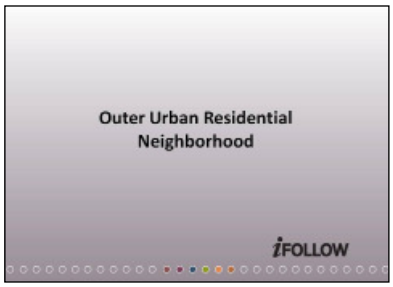
A "transitional" neighborhood is one on the edge between the ring of inner urban residential areas and the inner city. It is called "transitional" because it is changing. Its historic identity with a particular cultural group is breaking down as long-term residents leave. Single-family homes may be broken up into apartments for newly-arrived immigrants from different parts of the world than the long-term residents. More and more renters move in, bringing poorer people who do not have sufficient extra energy, knowledge or power to maintain a strong community structure. There is the risk that disinvestment will begin and the

neighborhood will decline and become part of the deteriorated inner city.

An "outside" organization can play a key role in this type of situation, helping to mobilize the community, strengthen local resources and get the attention of foundations, business coalitions, government agencies, etc. Christian groups have played this role in some communities across North America, and included church growth and evangelism as part of a wholistic approach. Walter E. Ziegenhals has documented examples of this type of urban ministry in his book, *Urban Churches in Transition*. An urban ministry sponsored by the Adventist Church could successfully use this approach, if personnel with the necessary technical skills are brought in at least as consultants and trainers.

Outer Urban Residential Neighborhood

Beyond the ring of historically ethnic, Blue Collar neighborhoods in each metropolitan area, there is a ring of middle class and upper middle class neighborhoods with single-family homes, small lawns and few businesses. In older cities, many of these may be older neighborhoods where several generations of affluent people have lived; the managers in businesses, professionals in education and health care, and government staff specialists. In the "newer" metropolitan areas, many of these neighborhoods are not much different than the suburban towns around the central city. In some cases suburban towns have been annexed by the central city, but still retain their original name as neighborhood identification.



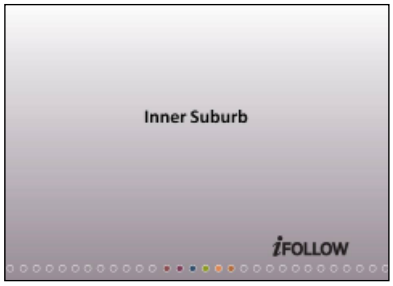
These residential neighborhoods often have the best schools, thriving youth organizations and music and arts groups. The residents make good incomes and are able to purchase almost any services that they need. They provide strong support for the community organizations with which they are connected. There are relatively few unmet needs in these communities, although gourmet vegetarian cooking classes, quality youth ministries and creative "niche" ministries will find a response.

Typically there are a number of churches in these outer urban, middle class neighborhoods. Presbyterian, Lutheran, and Episcopal congregations will be founded in the upper middle class communities, and Baptist and Methodist congregations in the middle class communities. Catholic parishes will be present in all of these neighborhoods, and there will be a scattered few Jewish synagogues and Orthodox churches. Most of these neighborhoods will not have an Adventist congregation in them. Where they do exist, it is likely that the majority of the members do not live in

the community and commute from throughout a wide segment of the metropolitan area.

Inner Suburb

By definition, a suburb is not part of the municipal government of the central city. It is either a separately-incorporated town or unincorporated territory governed by the county. The character of the first ring of suburban towns, immediately adjacent to the central city is usually not much different than the outer ring of urban neighborhoods. In fact, the boundary is often unknown to residents who do not have strong roots in the community.



Like the residents of outer urban, residential neighborhoods, these are affluent commuters, middle class and upper middle class families with heads of households employed in professional, managerial and technical occupations. Most of them work in the central city. Some work in the suburbs.

These communities often have a much stronger feeling about "localism." The residents do not want to be "swallowed up" in metropolitan-wide organizations that are dominated by the central city. The leaders have a strong concern to build and preserve their own local organizations and programs within the suburban town. Many of these inner suburbs have a long, rich history as a small town dating back to the 18th or 19th centuries. The community leaders work to preserve that memory and what they believe to be the unique values of their community. To work effectively in such a community, it is absolutely necessary to connect with key civic leaders and work within the framework of local identity and values.

In most of the metropolitan areas of North America, there is an Adventist congregation in one or two of the largest of the inner suburbs. In a few places, there is a strong Adventist community, centered around one or more Adventist institutions, in one of the inner suburbs. This was originally established in the last years of the 19th Century or the first few years of the 20th Century as an "outpost" outside the city from which to minister to the city. Today it has been engulfed by the growing city and is completely urbanized.

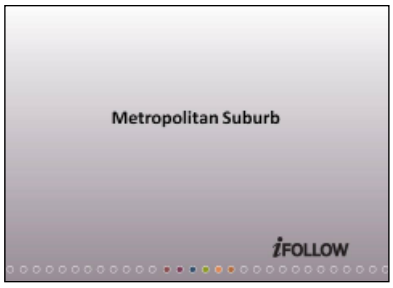
In these few suburbs where there is a strong Adventist community with some size and history, there is a unique opportunity to make a significant contribution. In some places an Adventist health care organization owns or operates a community hospital that is very much a part of the local system. In other places an Adventist Community Services agency is respected as a provider of social services by community leaders.

Most of the inner suburbs do not have an Adventist congregation, or any Adventist

presence. They typically do have a full complement of the major denominations and faiths represented. Again, this is largely "unreached territory" for the Seventh-day Adventist mission and message.

Metropolitan Suburb

Most suburban communities in a metropolitan area are those who do not share a boundary with the central city. These neighborhoods are simply part of a massive belt of suburbanization which usually contains the majority of the population in the metropolitan area. This is where most North Americans live today: residential neighborhoods interspersed with shopping centers, malls and clusters of restaurants, cinemas, and other entertainment. Connected by freeways and major highways with the central city and the rest of the metropolitan area, these are sometimes called "bedroom" communities, because there is little industry or major office buildings and the majority of the residents commute in to jobs in the central city or at commercial and industrial centers elsewhere in the metro area.



A few of these suburbs have a more affluent character and include upper middle class as well as middle class professionals, managers and proprietors of small businesses in the community. Most are just "average," and include a mix of middle class and lower middle class residents who work at technical, office and service jobs, or may be skilled artisans in construction or aerospace and electronic industries. A growing number work in new, computer-related businesses of the "information age." Some younger Blue Collar workers, those from the highest-paid segment of union labor, have moved from the "old" inner urban, residential neighborhoods where thier parents and older siblings still reside into these suburbs. One example of this is where the central city allows its police officers and fire fighters to live outside the city in a suburban town.

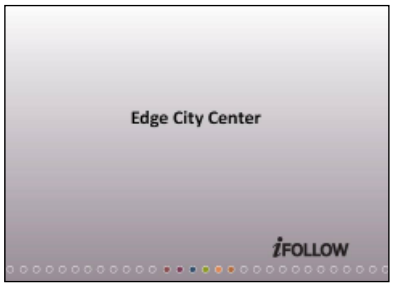
The needs in these communities focus on child care, family life, education, health care, recreation, the arts and activities for children and youth. Child care has become a national issue in the United States because most young mothers in these suburban communities must also hold a full-time job outside the home in order to pay the mortgage. Most middle class families feel pressed to attain a higher level of affluence than is easily within their reach, and this places strain on their marriages and family relationships. Family ministries, children's ministries, youth ministries and Christian education, especially preschool programs, can all make an important contribution in the suburbs.

There are typically fewer churches in suburban towns than in central city neighborhoods. In general, the newer the development, the fewer churches there are. Church planting seems to lag behind growing communities, and new suburban developments often have a greater number of younger adults who are not active in churches. This creates the opportunity context in which many of the well-known, evangelical "megachurches" have started. Conservative, evangelical churches, and Baptist and Methodist congregations are the most numerous in the suburbs. There are also many Catholic parishes in the suburbs.

Adventist church planting also needs to focus on the suburbs. In most metropolitan areas in North America, less than one in five suburban communities has an Adventist church. Because of the costs associated with purchasing property and building a typical, middle class church building, Adventists have tended to favor congregations that draw members from a wide area instead of community-based congregations. Of course, this is a serious barrier to evangelizing the longer-term residents with more roots in the community. This is one reason why a very high percentage of Adventist converts are from among those who have recently moved into town. (Dudley, *et al*.)

Edge City Center

In the last two or three decades, planned communities that include many of the functions of "downtown" have been built on the other edge of several major metropolitan areas. Some of these even have impressive clusters of skyscrapers. These are attuned to the emergence of new industries in the "information age," and cater to growing corporations, computer-related enterprises, etc. Easy access to parking and major freeways, homes within walking distance of the office, and suburban amenities such as outdoor swimming pools and patios are planned around office towers with the extensive space necessary for big businesses. All of these "edge city" developments are a few minutes from a major airport.



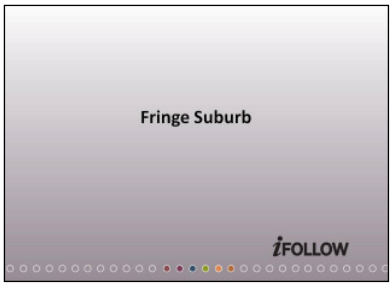
This caters to a new generation of business managers and entrepreneurs who were largely raised in the suburbs, but need the facilities of a "downtown." So a downtown neighborhood is re-created at the edge of the suburbs with immediate access to the highway and air travel systems. Will these "edge city" developments eventually replace the old downtown as the centers of power and finance in North America? No one knows, but it would take several generations for such a change to take place.

Edge city developments often control church facilities. Many insist that

denominations share common buildings for Protestants, Catholics and Jews, and do not permit the construction of additional church buildings. Regulations also usually rule out significant numbers gathering for house churches. These communities may be some of the most unchurched in North America, yet I know of only one Adventist congregation seeking to minister in such a context. This is another frontier for Adventist mission.

Fringe Suburb

The furthest reaches of suburban development are the new communities along the freeways and interstate highways. With newer homes on larger lots, these communities attract the newly affluent middle and upper middle class, often younger middle-aged couples. Strict zoning rules mean there are few, if any businesses. Built literally "in the middle of farms," these communities have no history, despite the names given to them by the developer's marketing experts. They are usually in unincorporated territory governed by the county, so they have no organs of community government.



The people who move into these neighborhoods are usually very involved in business and professional lives elsewhere, and so there is almost no community life. A homeowners association may function to deal with a few unavoidable issues and to keep out any organization that might complicate life. Children are driven to schools outside the community. Those families who attend church drive outside the community; some may still have ties with churches in the inner suburbs or central city. By and large neighbors do not know each other, and seem to value the anonymity of these communities.

Because these are affluent, active people, the residents of this type of neighborhood will usually meet their own needs by utilizing businesses and services in the metropolitan area. If you ask them about "community needs," they will often have a difficult time relating to that phrase because of the very individualistic values they live by. "If I need health care, I will look in the phone book and find a physician," one man responded during a community survey. "If I need a fitness program, I will look in the yellow pages for a fitness club or personal trainer. What I need is for people to stay away and not come knocking on my door asking silly questions."

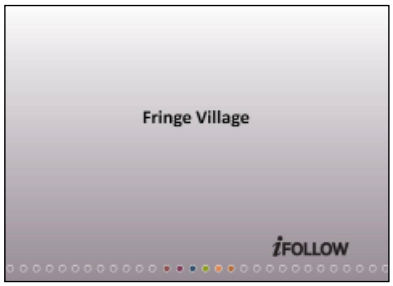
On the other hand, once a community of this type has been in existence for a decade or more, one does find youth and children's programs, such as Cub Scouts, operating. And there may be a horse-stable business hidden away nearby or a new driving range down the highway a mile or two. Despite their individualistic values, these communities do eventually show that there are some things they need.

There are few churches in these neighborhoods. Denominations do not seem to respond very quickly to these developments, and it is difficult to start a congregation in this context. Where new congregations are planted, based on a few projects that I have observed, they seem to start with new buildings at locations between two or three fringe suburbs, visible on a major freeway that serves the area. At times they start with buildings that were not constructed as religious architecture, utilizing a storefront in a shopping center or a new warehouse.

More often, congregations long established in small towns near the edge of the metropolitan area or in the outer suburbs attempt to reach out to these fringe communities. If there is an active family in the congregation who live in a nearby fringe community, they can become a "bridge" simply through friendship evangelism and a small group meeting in their home. If the congregation conducts a strong Pathfinder Club or youth ministry, it can be a means of outreach to families in a nearby fringe community.

Fringe Village

This community was originally an independent, rural village, but now the growing edge of the metropolitan area has overrun it. It is a mix of older, long-term residents and younger, newly-arrived mid-life couples with children. The older, long-term residents have a more rural viewpoint and want the community to be a friendly, small town. The new arrivals have a more urban orientation, and are often "too busy" to care about local, bucolic ways. This creates tension and can break out in conflicts.



There is likely a full range of needs in this community, although older residents may feel that they are "too small" to do anything about it and newer arrivals may feel that regional resources can meet the needs. Often the village has a strong core of community leaders who do rally behind some ideas, and the younger families have strong concerns about the schools and other programs for their children. This makes it possible to identify and launch new community service programs in this context, if you understand the skills of networking, gaining collaboration and coalition-building. Social services for the elderly, local access to health care, family counseling, family life education, as well as activities for children and youth, and Christian education, are all opportunities for ministry in this type of community.

There are usually at least two or three strong churches in a fringe village. Often these are congregations with long histories, and they may be struggling with how to accommodate an influx of younger families. Protestant churches have a long history associated with rural villages in North America, and in a few places there are Catholic

parishes that were started when this was still a rural village. In the southern U.S. there will almost always be a Baptist church in the village. In the Midwest, there is almost always a Methodist church, and in the upper Midwest there will undoubtedly be a Lutheran church.

Some of these fringe villages have a small Adventist congregation. Unfortunately, these are often without the resources needed to take full advantage of the opportunities presented with the influx of younger families. When metropolitan growth begins to overrun a small village, it is time for the conference to place one of its best pastors there and pour in extra resources. Adventist evangelism has a proven ability to win newcomers in the community, and the Adventist school system provides an attractive alternative when local schools are overcrowded. Family ministries, Pathfinder Club and an active teen group, along with a warm, contemporary worship service come together in an excellent strategy to take advantage of this opportunity.

Former Rural Settlement

This was a rural settlement now at the outer edge of the metropolitan area. It has few zoning and land use controls, because there is no history of a village government and this has been considered simply open country. So, there is a hodgepodge of mobile homes, older houses in a variety of conditions, newer suburban homes, and some farming operations.

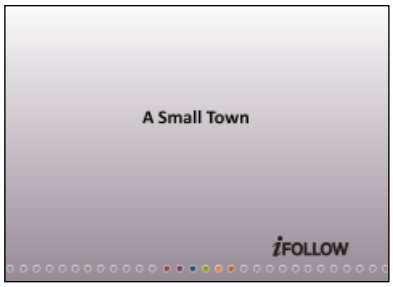
The population is not as dense as in the other fringe communities, so it may not seem to many observers that there is any community here at all. Yet, more people are moving into the area. A full range of human needs exist, because this situation has a mix of the poor, as well as affluent middle class. Crime may be an intermittent problem because of a lack of police presence. County government is the only responsible authority, and its planners may have only recently awakened to the trends and the size of population they are now dealing with.

There may not be any churches in the area. Or, there may be one church which started as a rural congregation, probably Protestant. The leaders of the group may live some distance away and have little or no sense of developments in the immediate vicinity of the church building. It is unlikely that there is an Adventist church in the immediate community.

A Small Town

When demographers use the phrase “small town,” it has a precise definition. It is

a town not located in a metropolitan area with a population of 2,500 to 49,999. It may be a commercial center that serves an agriculture, lumber or mining region. It is likely a government center of some kind, perhaps the "county seat" where the county courthouse and sheriff's office is located. It may have a small hospital that serves a rural region. Some of these small towns are "mill towns," heavily dependent on one major industry, with the raw materials close at hand. Industrialization and automation have often caused these towns to suffer reduced employment and blight.

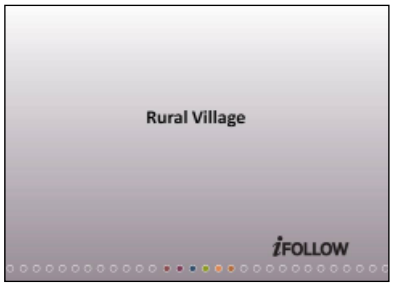


Community needs differ significantly from town to town, depending on the region of North America, the local economy, and other factors. Some small towns have high percentages of poor people, with all of the related problems. In Appalachia, for example, there are poverty conditions that have existed for more than a century. Other small towns, such as Aspen, Colorado, have an industry that attracts an affluent population and sustains the local community. The more prosperous towns may have needs related to family life, children and youth, as well as preventable health conditions such as heart disease.

Every small town has several churches. In the southern U.S. and the Midwest, each small town has a Baptist and a Methodist congregation. In the upper Midwest most also have a Lutheran church, in New England most have a United Church of Christ congregation, and in the Rocky Mountain region most have a Latter-day Saints "stake." Where there is a significant Catholic population, especially in the southwestern U.S., there is often a Catholic parish. Many small towns, usually the largest town in each county, have an Adventist congregation.

Rural Village

The smallest towns, with populations of less than 2,500 and located in a rural areas, are villages where almost everyone knows everyone else. Typically these villages have only a handful of businesses, post office, maybe a public school and government services run almost entirely by volunteers. Some of the families make a living in these activities, while others are all employed in agriculture, logging, mining, petroleum or the outdoor recreation and resort industries, depending on the location.



Community needs run the full range, and the services to meet most needs must come from some distance outside the village. Many rural areas are in particular need of primary health care services. The practical logistics of delivering various services to villages this small

often requires a program that serves an entire rural region. It is unrealistic for a small church in a village of this size to think of conducting a program on its own that will accomplish much in meeting local needs. It is best for the congregation to think of pursuing this goal in collaboration with other congregations throughout a wider area. The benefit to their village will actually be greater than if they insist on a purely local program.

Small, rural villages typically have one, two or three churches. The denominational pattern is much the same as that described above for small towns. The smallest villages often have a "union" church or community-based congregation that is not affiliated with any national denomination. The building was typically constructed long ago on donated land and through volunteer effort. The organization is quite simple; a few volunteers keep the Sunday school going even when there is no preacher to lead in worship. They welcome a preacher from almost any denomination who is willing to speak just once or on some kind of regular schedule. There are a few Adventist churches in small, rural villages.

A Rural Area

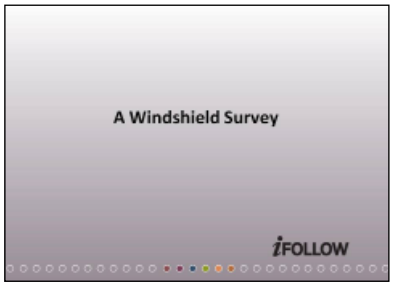
The least urbanized places in North America are the "wide, open spaces," farms with scattered homes sometimes several miles apart or wilderness. Even in the mountains, deserts and large tracts of undeveloped land, there are isolated homes and a handful of people. Often they know one another over a wide area and have a relatively strong sense of neighborliness.

The nature of these rural areas is different in the various regions of North America, from the forests and isolated fishing cabins of Atlantic Canada and the northwest to the hollows of Appalachia, from the large ranches and open range of the southwestern U.S. to the fields of the Midwest, each region has its own character. The full range of human needs occur among these isolated folk, and the same regional programs that can best serve small villages would also reach the rural areas.

There are a number of churches scattered in rural areas. Most no longer function weekly, but are kept in repair by a few members, often because of the attached cemetery, and may have occasional events. Few of these rural churches are affiliated with a major denomination. Very few Adventist churches are located in rural areas, except in a number of instances where an Adventist congregation has its building along a highway between two small towns or villages. This is a strategy in which the plan is to minister to both towns from a central point. In fact, it usually means that the church is not recognized as being a part of either community.

A Windshield Survey

A quick way to begin to gather information about your community is to do a "windshield survey." Handout 3 provides a specific tool that you can use in this method of data collection. It works best if this is done in teams of two, one person driving and the other working as observer and taking notes. In densely-populated areas, it can be used as a walking tour instead of done from cars.



The procedure for a "windshield survey" is to break your group into teams of two. Have the community mapped out prior to the meeting and quickly assign sections of streets. The idea is for each team to go up and down several streets which cut across the entire community or a major portion of it. (It is like "flying a grid pattern" in a search from the air.) If you have a large area to cover and relatively few volunteers, then use a sampling method. Have each team drive every third street or every fifth street, for example. Avoid dead-ends and short streets.

The observers are to take notes and not come back with reports on as much as they can see. There may be specific kinds of useful information that you want them to look for in addition to the items on Handout 3. For example, schools where a tutoring project might be started or empty meeting space for a community Bible class. Take a few minutes to review the worksheet and your additional list of items with the teams before they go out, so that they understand clearly what to look for and the kind of reports that you will want.

After the teams spend an hour or so scanning the community, the most valuable part of this exercise comes during the debriefing. The teams should assemble again at your initial meeting place. Here you should have refreshments and a flip chart or chalk board. Ask each observer to give a brief verbal report and encourage the entire group to join in a discussion of what they saw and what it means to your ministry goals.

What kind of neighborhood is this? Where does it fit in the overall picture? What can you conclude from the types of homes and buildings? From the location of the community relative to the metropolitan area in general or the rural region?

What needs seem to exist in the community? Did you observe lots of children with few places to play, or men standing on street corners during the work day? Are these indicators of the need for children's ministries or job programs? Are there indicators of poverty, or do these homes appear to house affluent people who may experience stress and a higher incidence of heart disease? Are there many outlets for alcoholic beverages?

What churches did you see? What denominations and faiths are present in the community? Do the church buildings look prosperous and well-maintained, or small and run-down? Are there any storefront churches, or churches with innovative locations in shopping malls and names like "Victory Family Life Center"? Do the churches have plenty of parking, which might indicate the members drive in from a distance? What youth activities, schools and community service programs were visible at or associated with the churches?

What kinds of people live in this community? Were there symbols of particular cultures or ethnic groups? Are these young families with children, or older folk? Did you see many religious symbols in windows, on homes or cars? What did you notice about how they dressed, did they walk or drive? Did you see joggers or games being played in community parks?

Does anyone have immediate ideas that should be acted upon right away? Is it the consensus of the group that there are some specific steps that should be taken immediately? For example, did someone see a potential meeting place that should be inquired about? Or, did one of the teams stumble into an immediate opportunity for a service project that would be visible in the neighborhood? Or, did someone start a conversation with an individual who has requested printed materials, a video or a Bible study?

As you summarize the reports of the observers, some key realities will emerge. These observations will help you understand the abstract data available from demographic statistics, and visual real people and the real life of a community as you study maps and documents. Some of the data you gather may seem to contradict what was seen in the "windshield survey." Even though a visual scan is not as scientific as census data, which such contradictions come to mind, they do provide opportunities to learn more by asking questions and digging a little deeper. It is impossible to really understand a community without actually cruising the streets and eye-balling the homes, stores, churches and people.

Handouts in this Package

1. Some Basic Definitions
2. Community Overview
3. Windshield Survey Form

Additional Resources

Dudley, *et al,* "Who are(n't) we baptizing?" *Ministry*, April 1989, pages 4-8.

Holland, Joe and Peter Henriot (1983). *Social Analysis: Linking Faith and Justice.* Orbis.

Krile, James (2006). *The Community Leadership Handbook.* Fieldstone Alliance.

Sahlin, Monte (2005). *Understanding Your Community Revised Edition.* Lincoln, NE: Center for Creative Ministry. (A new edition will be published in 2011 following the 2010 census in the United States.)

Warren, Rachelle B. and Donald I. Warren (1977). *The Neighborhood Organizer's Handbook.* University of Notre Dame Press.

Ziegenhals, Walter E. (1978). *Urban Churches in Transition.* New York City: The Pilgrim Press.

Video Seminar

Sahlin, Monte (1997). *Community Action Leadership.* Lincoln, NE: Center for Creative Ministry.

Major Map Publishers

Barclay Publishing Company

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800-275-7263

Streetwise Maps

www.streetwisemaps.com

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Sarasota, FL 34234

800-497-1314

Thomas Brothers Maps is now a division of Rand McNally.

See above.

Universal Map Company

www.universalmap.com

800-829-6277

Discussion Questions

1. How many different communities have you resided in since you became an adult? What were the reasons for each time you moved?
2. What kind of community did you live in during your childhood? Your youth? Your early adulthood? Now? How have the differences, if any, affected you?
3. Are there types of communities you find difficult to understand? i.e., if you were raised in a rural area, do you find it easy to relate to urbanites, or vice versa? What do you think this means for the mission call God gives each person?
4. How are the methods your church is using to reach people working now? What would you like to see change? What do you not want to see change?
5. Why does it matter whether we understand our communities in this demographic way? Doesn't everybody need Jesus? Can't we just share Him wherever we are?

Group Activity

A Windshield Survey

Purpose: To begin to gather information about your community.

Preparation: Have the community mapped out prior to the meeting. Break your group into teams of two, one person driving and the other working as observer and taking notes. In densely-populated areas, it can be used as a walking tour instead of done from cars. Quickly assign sections of streets from the map you have made. Make enough copies of Handout 3 to give to each team.

Assignments: The idea is for each team to go up and down several streets which cut across the entire community or a major portion of it. (It is like "flying a grid pattern" in a search from the air.) If you have a large area to cover and relatively few volunteers, then use a sampling method. Have each team drive every third street or every fifth street, for example. Avoid dead-ends and short streets. The observers are to take notes and not come back with reports on as much as they can see. There may be specific kinds of useful information that you want them to look for in addition to the items on Handout 3. For example, schools where a tutoring project might be started or empty meeting space for a community Bible class. Take a few minutes to review the worksheet and your additional list of items with the teams before they go out, so that they understand clearly what to look for and the kind of reports that you will want.

Time: This is difficult to assess because it will vary depending on the size of your group and the size of your community. Try to take only 15 or 20 minutes to assign teams and explain what they are to do. Allow an hour or so for scanning the community.

Debrief: The teams should assemble again at your initial meeting place. Here you should have refreshments and a flip chart or chalk board. Ask each observer to give a brief verbal report and encourage the entire group to join in a discussion of what they saw and what it means to your ministry goals. Here are some questions for discussion. For more detail, refer to the main background material of this unit.

What kind of neighborhood is this? Where does it fit in the overall picture?

What needs seem to exist in the community?

What churches did you see?

What kinds of people live in this community?

As you summarize the reports of the observers, some key realities will emerge. These observations will help you understand the abstract data available from demographic statistics, and visual real people and the real life of a community as you study maps and

documents. Some of the data you gather may seem to contradict what was seen in the "windshield survey." Even though a visual scan is not as scientific as census data, which such contradictions come to mind, they do provide opportunities to learn more by asking questions and digging a little deeper. It is impossible to really understand a community without actually cruising the streets and eye-balling the homes, stores, churches and people.

Handout 1

Some Basic Definitions

Metropolitan area has a precise definition as used by demographers and planning professionals. It is at least one county in which there is a central city with a population of at least 50,000. It may include additional counties if the suburbs spill over far enough. The determining factor as to whether or not an outlaying county is in a metro area has to do with whether or not a majority of the work force commutes in to jobs. It is economics more than culture or government that knit metropolitan areas together.

Central city is the largest town at the center of a metropolitan area. It must have a population of at least 50,000 to qualify.

Suburb is any town other than the central city which is part of a metropolitan area because the county it belongs to is included in that metro area.

Non-urban communities are those located outside a metropolitan area. In North America, these constitute less than one in five of the total population. A number of the small towns (with a population of less than 50,000) are recognized as "micropolitan" areas, meaning that they have an economy in a rural area that functions much like an urban area with similar communication media, etc. Urbanization has become the pervasive sociological reality for North America and, as of 2008, the majority of the population on the globe.

Handout 2

Community Overview

1. What are the boundaries of the community?
2. Is there more than one neighborhood in the community? If so, how are they different?
3. How many people live in this community, and in how many households?
4. What is the population profile by age, ethnicity, income, occupations and types of households?
5. Where do people work?
6. What kinds of businesses exist and how many?
7. What kinds of community organizations and how many?
8. What form of government?
9. What kinds of recreation facilities and groups do people use?
10. What kinds of churches exist in the community and how many?
11. How many schools are there and do they have active PTAs?
12. What is the local political situation?
13. Do local issues cut across large or small populations?
14. Is there a community land-use plan?
15. Is there a hospital(s)?
16. What primary health care, mental health and social services exist?
17. What is the typical family lifestyle?
18. Is culture (the arts, music, public broadcasting, libraries) significant in the community?

Handout 3: Windshield Survey

Area covered	
Geography	
Characteristics	
Street layout	
Physical boundaries	
Identity markers	
Traffic flow	
Homes	
Kinds of housing	
Clusters of homes	
Appearance	
Residents	
Age group	
Impressions	
Relationships	