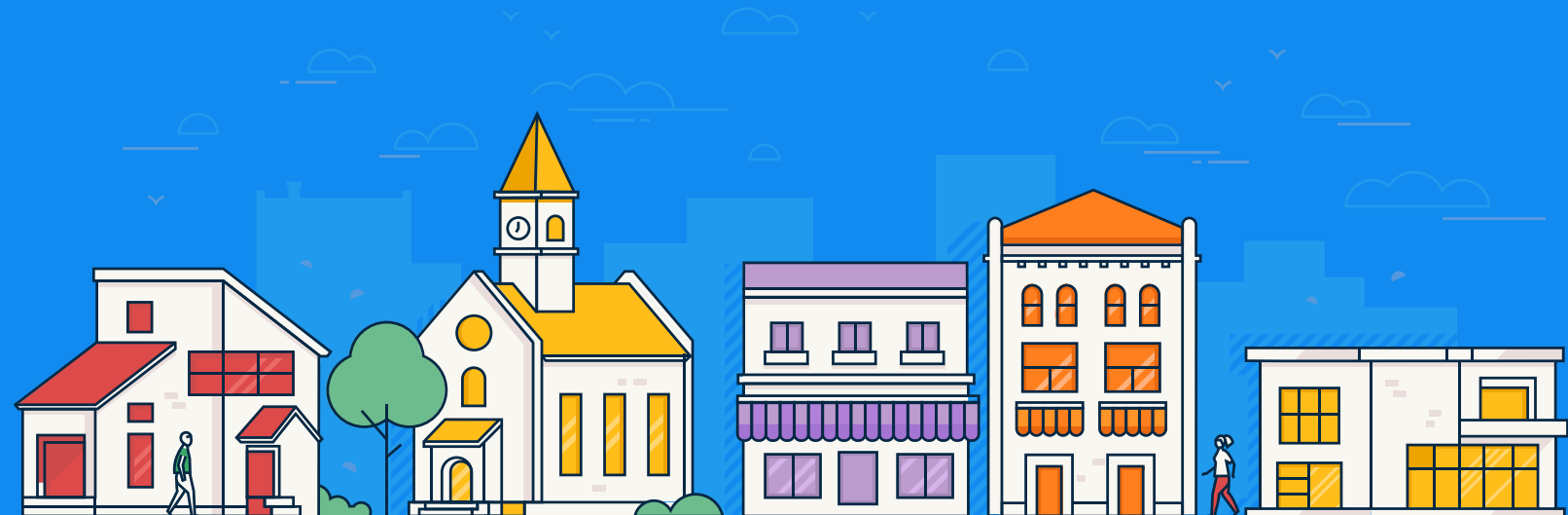


KNOWING YOUR NEIGHBOR

TO BETTER SERVE YOUR COMMUNITY





WHAT'S IN A NEIGHBORHOOD?

All around your church the proverbial fields are ripe for the harvest. In homes, apartments, and businesses people are yearning for meaning, purpose, and hope. Scarcely able to express this need, most have settled for an introspective existence unaware of the mechanisms they've used to numb their hearts from their eternal longing - to know and be known by God. In other words...

You've got a lot of people in your neighborhoods who need Jesus.

And more, they need to be loved by his people - to see and be seen. Regardless of what preconceived ideas you have or excuses you've made about why your neighborhood is "tapped out" or unresponsive to the Gospel, the truth remains...

Your neighborhood needs you.

This guide has been created to help your church and its leaders develop strategies for gaining a better understanding of your surrounding community so you can reach them more effectively to experience health and growth.



HOW WELL DO YOU KNOW YOUR NEIGHBORS?

Growing begins with knowing. You can't expand into your neighborhood with the good news of the Gospel when you don't know who you're reaching. So the question is, do you know them?

Questions to Consider:

- Within a three mile radius of your church...
- What is the average size of the family?
- What is the predominant age group?
- What is the predominant ethnic group?
- What is the ethnic breakdown of the people?
- What is the average income?
- How well do they respond to mailers, yard signs, street signs, online advertising?
- What percentage attends your church?
- What percentage has, at one time, visited your church?
- What percentage of households are single-parent?
- What is the breakdown between apartments and single-family dwellings?
- And on and on and on.

Are you seeing a trend? Perhaps there is a lot you don't know. And although some of the above questions might seem trivial, the meaning they hold could be more than what meets the eye.

For example, knowing the average income and the average family size could speak volumes about the affluence of your neighborhood, which could significantly shape the messaging, programming, and outreach you employ to minister to them.

If you want to reach your neighbors, you need to know your neighbors.

HOW WELL DO YOUR NEIGHBORS KNOW YOU?

While not the particular focus of this guide, being known is an aspect of knowing. Gaining an understanding of the perceptions about your church in the community, coupled with what you know about them, creates a powerful recipe for outreach.

Churches need to know how the people in their community see them.

It's important for church leaders to have at least a little insight, intuition, or rumor of how the church is perceived for 3 big reasons:

1. **Perception shapes opinion** - and you want to be part of that conversation.
2. **Reach depends on reception** - if they won't listen, you can reach them.
3. **Faith begins with friendship** - the Gospel is one friend introducing another to Jesus.

As you know our neighbors better, you'll speak to them in ways that help them shape proper perspectives about your church.



THE IMPORTANCE OF KNOWING

Do you know what a meal train is? Have you ever been part of one? It's when a bunch of people get together to bring meals to a person or family who just had a big life event and can't - presumably - tend to the very basics of life because of said event. Terribly hard life events such as giving birth, getting sick, moving homes, or suffering a breakup all precipitate the formation of a meal train.

In modern times it is nearly impossible to prepare a meal that will meet the needs of the person for whom you're preparing a meal-train meal. Should it be paleo, low-fat, high-fat, vegetarian, vegan, dairy-free, sugar-free, gluten-free? If you don't get it right, you could bring a celiac a loaf of french bread to pair with the pasta and essentially sentence them to death.

With exceptions made for the fact that the Gospel isn't a menu, there is a corollary here. Churches should avoid the temptation to adapt every offering to the tastes of their neighbors. But if you're going to be supplying the bread of life to sustain and nurture your community to health, maybe you should know enough about them to present the good news in such a way that they'll open the door when the spiritual meal train comes knocking.

Your ability to minister in your community is dependent on your understanding of it.

There are many reasons why it's important to know your neighbors, we'll focus on the three that are most common and most important.





MEETING NEEDS

We've already alluded to it in the previous section, but it's worth diving a bit deeper. Your neighbors need you. More to the point, they need God - through you. As Jesus' Body, your church is to represent him well in your neighborhood. That involves meeting their physical and spiritual needs.

You can't effectively meet the needs of your community if you don't know what they are.

See if this scenario seems realistic. One of your leaders saw how another church across town used their parking lot to host an antique car show on the first Saturday of every month. It started drawing a pretty big crowd so the church began giving away water bottles and popcorn. Before they knew it, a lot of the people who attended the car show started coming to church.

If it worked for them, maybe it'd work for you. So you give it a shot, unaware that most of the people in your surrounding area are either young professionals or families in lower-income brackets; neither of which have any interest in classic cars. And thus, you missed the mark.

Understanding what your neighbors need is the key to unlocking service and outreach.

SHARING FAITH

If you came across a person who had grown up attending church services, maybe got confirmed in the Church, and perhaps even still dropped in on special holidays and occasions, you'd probably fall right in line with "Christianese" speak when sharing your faith. You might refer to biblical events with the assumption they had heard the story before. You might use words like "Trinity" or "Baptism" or "Communion". And you'd be hitting home, probably making some great points that would help that person grow in their faith.

Now, imagine you're speaking with a person who grew up in a secular home, had no understanding of the Bible, much less the God it describes, and thinks Trinity is simply the name of a character in a sci-fi movie. How effective would your appeals of deeper belief be?

Here's the point.

If you don't know your neighbors, you can't speak their language.

And if you're not speaking the same language, the message is lost. This means you must find ways to learn new means of understanding the people in your area so you can communicate the Gospel in a way that makes sense to them. You can start where they need to start. You can continue at the pace they need. You can interject stories and illustrations that make sense.

Leading people into deeper faith requires communication that makes sense to them.





Believe it or not, at some point people in your area might hold negative feelings about your church. It could be a building expansion, a parking lot project, an issue with the way you take over the nearby parks, or perhaps it's those annoying cards you hand out. No, it's the street signs on the corners and the yard signs in people's yards. It's the stance you took on abortion, and the silence you had regarding racism. It's the... You get the point.

People will always find reasons to hate the Church.

One of the biggest causes of division is difference. When people are different, it invites criticism. Lack of understanding fuels a distaste for differences and as people start taking offense, small differences become fractures in the community.

It's essential for the people in your community, especially the ones who don't like you, or God, to at least understand your intentions. What's more, you need to understand their motivations.

When you start to see that most of their opposition is based in fear, it helps you craft responses that inspire confidence. When you know the specifics of why they fear, hate, and malign, it helps you pinpoint the exact thing you need to say or do to either find peace or move past.

Knowing the motives of your opposition puts you in a position to respond with compassion.

When you are aware of what's being said and stirred in the community around your church, you can formulate healthy responses instead of negative reactions. Thus, if you want to overcome obstacles you have to know the difference between common ground and hills to die on.

You'll never gain the trust of your community without understanding their reasons.



HOW TO KNOW

Now that you understand that you need to know more, here's what you need to know to get a better understanding of your neighborhood. The following represent some immediate actions your church can take to discover all the opportunities in your community.

DEMOGRAPHICS STUDY

This is pretty straightforward. A data-driven approach to knowledge holds a lot of power. Remember those questions you just read in the first part of this guide? A good demographics study will help answer those questions.

Third-party services like MissionInSite™ provide community demographics analysis tools for churches, non-profits, and faith-based organizations. They allow you to drill down into incredible detail, uncovering seemingly limitless tidbits of valuable information.

Because it's created for non-profits, it includes more than just census data and objective numbers. You can dive deeper into things like religious preferences, backgrounds, and interests.

When you have access to demographics analysis tools it allows you to get specific insights into the various enclaves of your neighborhood, helping you target campaigns, outreach, service, and other initiatives for maximum impact and success.

A good demographics study is the starting point for starting anything.





IMPERFECT POLLING

Want to know someone's opinion? Just ask. There are a number of ways to solicit responses from those around you with ever increasing levels of outside opinion. Here are a few ways you can get some feedback.

- 1. Do a survey with people in your church.** Keep it simple and short. You'll get a lot of input from people you might not normally hear from. Ask questions not only about what they think, but about what they have heard or perceive from people outside the church.
- 2. Have your people share a survey outside your church.** Create an online form that your people can share with a few of their friends. All the answers will be collated in your form responses, and you should get a good cross-sampling of your neighborhood.
- 3. Conduct a survey on social media.** This will allow you to promote a survey and target it to people within your area who have no connection to your church. This survey should focus less on what people think of you, and more on who they are and what they need.

Remember, don't stress about getting the questions just right and don't ask a million questions. Think of the 3-5 most important things you need to know or understand about your neighborhood and focus on those. If you can start getting feedback from people you don't usually hear from, you might start noticing trends and then prayerfully consider changes you can make for more impact.

SPIES LIKE US

OK, no espionage or subterfuge, but sometimes having a “plant” in the community can help you understand how people are responding to your church. There are, no doubt, online community groups, business associations, sports leagues, clubs, parents organizations, and the like that all conduct activities in your community. It might be wise to join some of those groups to see what people say when you bring up the church.

We are NOT suggesting that you be deceptive to elicit information. Only that you expand your circle of input to the people who might already be talking about the community and your church’s place in it.

EXAMPLE: A church in the southwest discovered a Facebook group of mom’s in the neighborhood. Apparently, many of the moms were talking about some of the family outreach activities the church periodically put on. The church - via the mom who joined the group - discovered valuable information on what was “working” and what wasn’t. They learned that one of their events was a total flop, and another was super well received. This anecdotal support allowed them to increase the effectiveness of their outreach.





TRIAL AND ERROR

Sometimes you just have to try some stuff and see what sticks. What's that saying about omelets?

Not everything you do is going to be a stunning success, but you can't discount the opportunity to learn. We suggest trying to capture input and information at each service, event, or meeting you do. That way you can start to track attendance, return visitors, see who's connected, and so on.

Tracking people's journey in your church starts with their first point of contact. But how will you know what that is if you're not asking?

Try to pay attention and record the who and what of each of your activities and initiatives and you'll start to see trends that inform your next decisions.



THE ULTIMATE GOAL

Understanding the nuance of your neighborhood is not a perfect science. And it's unwise to stay up at night worrying about what everyone else is thinking about your church. Don't do that.

However, with a little work, you can discover more about who you are ministering to so that you can reach more people, bless more families, lead more people to faith, and watch the health and growth of your church and your community soar.

The goal if information is transformation.

So get out there and get informed so your church can be the change agent God designed it to be!

Choosing the Right Ministry Partner

The know-how you need from experts you trust.

ACS Technologies is the original pioneer of Church Management Software (ChMS). We are firmly dedicated to serving local churches all over North America by providing the best-in-class ministry software and service solutions that help you fulfill Christ's mission for your Church.

Tools and support to strengthen churches.

We build great software, but we don't stop there. We have a "service first" approach that truly sets us apart. With hundreds of dedicated support and consulting personnel, your staff can reach our team 24/7. We're in your corner to help you with the ministry challenges you face every day.

Ideas and solutions powered by integrity.

Integrity is real for us, and it means consistently being faithful stewards by doing the right thing for church success. We have earned the trust of pastors, church staff, congregants, our employees, and colleagues for over 40 years.

A plan to meet your needs and move your ministry.


We're not just interested in satisfied customers. We see ourselves as your real ministry partner and will work with you to make disciples that will last for an eternity. We're excited to talk about your goals, create a plan together, and set you up with the software, service, and resources you need.

We believe in YOU!

ACS Technologies believes in the local church. Over 75% of our team has experience serving in their local churches. We know firsthand that serving the Church means serving people, and we take seriously our commitment to helping ministries like yours achieve their God-given mandate - to make disciples in their communities, states, and across the world.

Let's Talk

We know the challenges of switching or implementing new technology and how that can be intimidating. But we also know the unbelievable changes that have happened within churches that have partnered with us for their ministry needs. Let's connect and see how we can assist you in the greatest thing you do - grow God's Kingdom.

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