UNLOCKING COMMUNITY INSIGHTS

HOW TO FIND MORE PEOPLE TO SERVE IN YOUR COMMUNITY

BUILDING THE KINGDOM

FIND MORE PEOPLE TO SERVE

NURTURE AND GROW PEOPLE

FIND

NURTURE

EMPOWER

EMPOWER PEOPLE TO LEAD

You want your church and ministry to make a difference.

You put in lots of hours every week. You're praying for your community. You're preparing for worship services. *But something is missing.*

There is more you want to do. More you can do. More you should do to fulfill the mission potential of your church.

You want to be an impact-making church. You are called to minister to the community.

But where do you start?

Get informed. Get to know your community. Your church can't serve a community it doesn't know.

This guide is designed to explain how knowing your community helps inform your ministry and show love in more meaningful ways.

It's harder than ever.

Church leaders today have a tough assignment. Regardless of denomination, attendance has been declining, fueled even more by Covid-19. The Pew Research Center's Religious Landscape Study[1] shows a reduction in regular attendance from 39% to 36%, and the trend has continued. Moreover, people have left Christianity altogether. Pew Research also indicates a 12-point decline over the past 10 years[2] and the ACST American Beliefs Study found that the equivalent of the three largest cities in the U.S., a total of 15 million people, left Christianity during the same time period. [3]

The trends are influenced by our increased mobility, changing family models, and secular priorities. Digital communication and social media have become the dominant way many of us interact. Yet digital communications and social media are not preferred by everyone. While the shift to digital has brought the church many benefits, it also comes with drawbacks. For example, we have fewer face-to-face interactions with the people we serve — and those people have an ever-shrinking attention span. That makes it more difficult to get to know our neighbors.

Americans who have left Christianity since 2011 roughly equals the population of the three largest cities in the U.S.[3]

Chicago 2.7M	
Los Angeles 3.9M	**People who left Christianity** 14.9M
New York 8.8M	

Your community is composed of groups of people with different lifestyles, beliefs and concerns. They prefer to be contacted in different ways and have different levels of capability and interest in technology.

24%
of rural Americans are people of color today.[4]

Plus, our communities are changing more rapidly than ever. The 2020 U.S. Census makes it clear that communities are diversifying everywhere in the United States, even for churches in rural areas. According to the Brookings Institute, median rural counties became three percent more diverse between 2010 and 2020. Nearly a quarter of rural Americans are people of color today. [4]

Your community is composed of groups of people with different lifestyles, beliefs and concerns. They prefer to be contacted in different ways and have different levels of capability and interest in technology. Your church membership likely does not fully represent your surrounding community. And your surrounding community probably has changed over time. This all means you can't minister in one standard way.
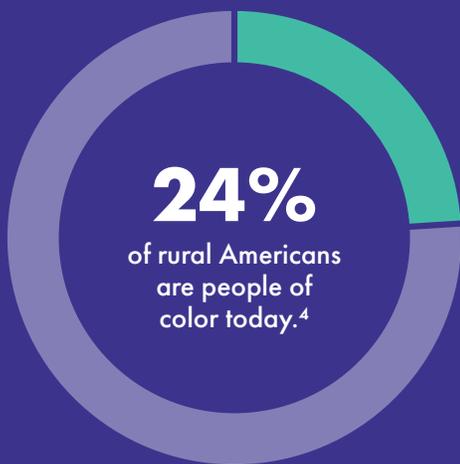
So it's not just you.

We live in a world where it's harder than ever to know the people around us. Just think about this: half of Americans say they have fewer than three close friends. [5]

That's double the rate of just three decades ago. That stat says a lot about the challenges facing churches in the third decade of the 21st century.

50%
of Americans say they have fewer than three close friends, doubling the rate from 30 years ago.[5]

That doesn't mean we stop trying.

We need to always be on the lookout for opportunities to engage the community in personal ways. Ministry will always be primarily an in-person activity. Our churches are relational and our faith is personal.

But what if those ways you engage people in your community personally were informed not by what you think your community wants and needs but what you know they need from you?

If you're noticing that you need some help understanding your community so you can better reach them, **now is the time to act.**

It's a place Harvest Tabernacle Bible Church in Los Angeles found themselves in just a few years ago.

The community was changing. Long-time residents were leaving, and wealthier residents were replacing them. Dr. Donald Cook, the church's senior pastor, could see the changes, but he didn't know the extent.

One day, Cook noticed a child pushing a stroller filled with groceries. He discovered many of the residents couldn't afford transportation to the grocery store, so they were walking extraordinarily far just to get basic food necessities. Something needed to change but Cook wanted to make sure that he really understood the need before mobilizing his church to act.

Dr. Cook radically changed his expansion plans for his church.

When the church was founded in 1976, their neighborhood was 95 percent African American. Today, Cook discovered, only 40 percent were African American. And Asians represent the fastest-growing population in the community.

Harvest Tabernacle used that information to invite a more diverse community to its roundtable discussion about how to solve the food crisis. The church handed out flyers in English, Spanish, Korean, and Vietnamese. The church got broad input from community segments they may not have heard from otherwise and discovered Cook's initial assessment was correct. The neighborhood needed a new local grocery store.

The board agreed to rebuild the church with a community grocery store on the ground level and four stories of affordable housing above.

Now, not only is Harvest Tabernacle demonstrating God's love in a practical way in the church's neighborhood, but they're also reaching new people in the process.

By leveraging insights about your neighbors, you can serve your community more effectively, too.

It's not as hard as you may think.

"Interpreting the data reported in MissionInsite really anchors down the Great Commission, which requires us to know our people and to serve our community."

Dr. Donald Cook II
Senior Pastor

Harvest Tabernacle Bible Church

Los Angeles, CA

What should you know about your community?

Demographic data refers to the statistical information that portrays the characteristics of a population, such as age, gender, income, education, and ethnicity. This information is crucial for your church because it helps you understand the composition of your community, so you can identify emerging trends, and discover potential areas of growth or concern.

Lifestyle data refers to the likely family structure, type of housing and neighborhood, interests, average income level, use of technology, and preferred communication channel. This information provides important context for ministry by helping you understand what types of families are in your community and how best to reach them.

We live in a data-driven world, where we are awash in information. But not everything is equally important for your church as you gain an understanding of the people in your surrounding neighborhood.

Discovering these attributes is a good way to start.

#1 Age distribution

Ministry looks different across age groups. Understanding the age breakdown of the people you're trying to reach will help you meet their unique needs within their life stage.

#2 Socio-economic status & income levels

No matter what socio-economic levels you find in your neighborhood, there will be unique needs your church can meet. For example, job training may be particularly important in working-class areas impacted by changing job needs.

#3 Spiritual background

Understanding the basic spiritual backgrounds of people in your community will help you immensely. You want to know what kind of faith experiences the people have that you're trying to reach.

And this information is just the beginning.

The right guidance can help you use data insights to effectively connect with the people you are trying to reach.

In fact, later in this guide, we'll introduce you to some of those opportunities.

#4 Ethnic & cultural diversity

Our communities are becoming more diverse with every passing year. When you review the specific makeup of your community, you'll have a better idea of how you can serve your neighbors. In fact, you might find pockets of people who speak another language that you didn't realize. That gives you the perfect opportunity to start a new language-based ministry in the community.

#5 Family composition

Knowing the basic size of families and how many children are in a typical home will give you an idea of the kinds of family ministries that are appropriate in your community. Some communities have a high number of children. Others have many singles. Still others have a large number of seniors. Knowing this information helps you tailor your ministries to better reach those segments.

#6 Education levels

Every church should want to reach people where they are. That means, in part, engaging them based upon their educational background. Communities with lower educational levels might benefit from educational ministries your church may provide (such as teaching English as a Second Language, literacy programs, or homework helpers for children). Plus, knowing the community's educational level helps you target your communication more effectively.

#7 Community map

This attribute is often overlooked. Being able to see the geographic bounds of the area your church is focused on reaching helps you clarify God's mission for your church. It's not that you're excluding people from those you're trying to reach. You won't turn people away who drive 30 minutes to your church. But it's important to understand the characteristics above in a specific geographic area.

If possible, map your church members as well. It'll help you have a good idea of how your membership compares to your community, and where they live in relation to those you're trying to reach.

Understand your own church.

While it's important to know your community, that's only a part of the solution. You need to have a clear understanding of your church family as well. That sounds easy, but depending upon the size of your church, it might not be.

You'll want to know much of the same information as you do about your community — ethnicity, age breakdown, education levels, lifestyles, etc.

You may have some basic information already, but you can do a survey to uncover even more information. Or use a tool like MissionInsite to get a detailed comparison of your church members with the surrounding community.

Make a positive impact on your community.

Comparative insights provide you a clear picture of who from the community is represented in your church, who is not, and where they are located. This comparison gives you data to determine what ministry is most important for your church and what ministry will most positively impact the community.

For example, you could discover an opportunity to offer English as a Second Language classes because you might have many people nearby who aren't native English speakers. That's a great ministry opportunity. Or you may find many single parents in the community who need support and care.

Turn your insights into ministry.

While learning about your community and your church family are great starts, they aren't your goal. You want to use those insights to connect them to your church.

You begin to do that by:

#1 Noticing the gaps

If the income levels in your neighborhood are low, are there physical needs (food, clothing, etc.) no one is meeting? Is unemployment high? Maybe your church can start a job-training program. Remember, look at the capacities of places that are meeting these needs. You may have a couple of places feeding people in your community, but are they over their capacity already?

#2 Taking stock

Churches with a large number of teachers in the congregation may be able start educational and/or age-based ministries. Have some contractors in your midst? Put them to work on a home-repair or disaster relief ministry.

#3 Matching skills & strengths

Here's where you'll find some real synergy. When you find places in your community with heavy needs that your church is specifically equipped to meet, begin praying about whether God wants you to start a ministry for those contexts.

#4 Looking for leaders

If you don't have a leader, you don't have a ministry. Look through the people you've identified with skills in the area for people who might have leadership potential. Go to that person and ask him/her to pray about serving as a leader. Don't push. If God calls your church to a new ministry, he'll provide a leader.
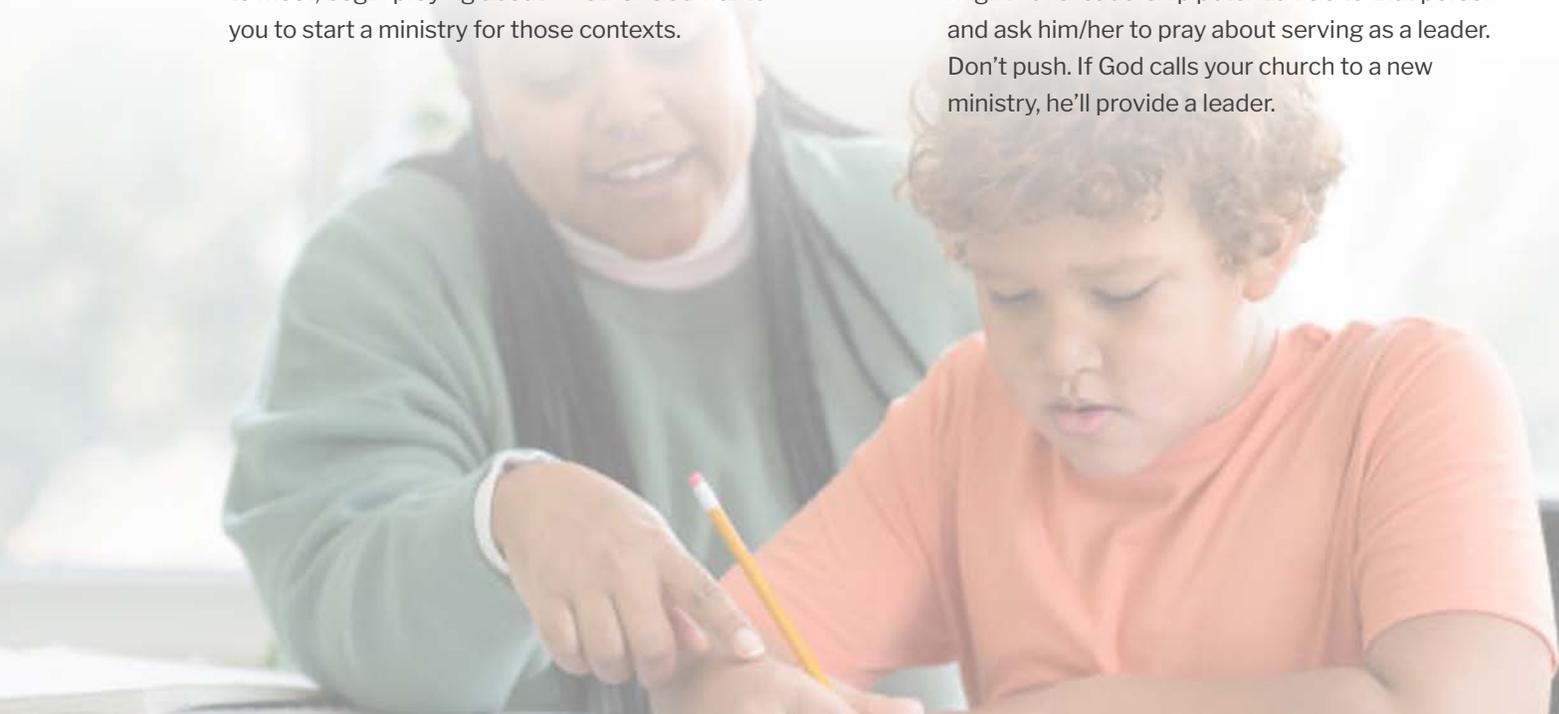
Take it further.

So far, this guide has given very brief instructions on how your church can turn insights about your community into ministry efforts. But there are so many more opportunities to love your neighbors better by knowing them better.

ACST Consulting can help. Based on our extensive experience helping Catholic and protestant denominations, we can be your partner for future ministry growth through data-driven insights.

ACST Consulting helps you read the signs of the time and understand what to do. You gain "contextual intelligence", which is an understanding of your community characteristics, community beliefs and preferences, and how your church compares to your community, so that you can offer the love of God more directly, passionately and effectively.

We can help you through the following:

Community Characteristics

In this 60-minute virtual session, you will have a detailed review of the demographics of your surrounding community to help you understand who lives in your neighborhood, plus trends over time so you understand how your community is changing. You will also receive an **ExecutiveInsite** report with the data used for the review.

Community Context

In this 60 – 90-minute virtual session you will gain an understanding of the beliefs, practices, preferences and attitudes of the people in your surrounding community, with our guidance regarding how to use this information to engage and interact with them. You will receive a **MinistryInsite** report and a **ReligiousInsite** report with this engagement.

Community Comparison

In this 90-minute virtual session you will be guided through a detailed review of how your church membership compares to the characteristics of your surrounding community. Through this session you will review the financial capacity of your church members, explore opportunities to engage people in relationship with your church, and identify potential ministries for the neighborhood. You will receive a **ComparativeInsite** report for your use.

Custom Strategic Planning

We'll use insights from an analysis of your church and community plus other inputs to help you clarify your purpose, values and vision, and/or help you identify priorities with goals and strategies, based on your particular need and interest.

We're just getting started.

By taking the time to know your community, you are better equipped to help them experience — and respond to — the hope and love of Jesus Christ.

Let's impact your community together.

Our mission at ACS Technologies is to help you fulfill *your* mission. Together we can turn community insights into actionable ministry.

"Behold, I tell you, raise your eyes and observe the fields, that they are white for harvest."

John 4:35 (NASB)

ACSTechnologies®
Community Intelligence Consulting

Turning community insights into actionable ministry.

LEARN MORE

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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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