

Who is My Neighbor? Analysis is Better Assumption.

Below is a new weekly series posting content from one of the most innovative content sources in the church world: SUMS Remix Book Summaries for church leaders. SUMS Remix takes a practical problem in the church and looks at it with three solutions; and each solution is taken from a different book. As a church leader you get to scan relevant books based on practical tools and solutions to real ministry problems, not just by the cover of the book. Each post will have the edition number which shows the year and what number it is in the overall sequence. (SUMS provides 26 editions per year, delivered every other week to your inbox).

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The community around our church has changed, and we are not sure how to respond.

Some say that we live in the age of the “selfie” and are raising a generation aware of how they look, and at the same time they are growing more and more unaware of the world around them. What about your church? If you took a “congregational selfie” and then compared it to a “neighborhood selfie” of the community around your church, what would you find?

For many churches, especially established congregations with years of ministry impact, there will be a significant difference.

In the beginning, the church was a reflection of the community where it was located. There was probably significant and steady growth – as the community grew, the church naturally grew. Many churches might even have been seen as their “community center.”

However, over time, every community begins to change. It may be as simple as the community aging – or as complex as an ethnic, racial, or other socioeconomic change. Whatever the case, the community around the church probably changed...

...but the church didn't change.

Over time, most churches resist, and even fear change.

The growing disparity between a church and its community was probably subtle – maybe even occurring over several generations. It starts with a few people beginning to move into other parts of the town and no longer making the drive back to their old community. Other events beyond the church's control take place, like key industry moving out of town and the workforce following. Whatever the cause, the end result is that the church begins to no longer look like the community around it and many leaders are not sure how to respond.

Solution #1: Conduct a community analysis.

THE QUICK SUMMARY

In addition to understanding the Word of God, it is necessary to understand the people we serve. Once we make sense of our neighborhoods and communities, we can begin to "diagnose" needs and apply the proper "dose" of the gospel to meet those opportunities.

Neighborhood Mapping awakens the neighborhood explorer to consider effective methodology of understanding their neighborhood. Dr. Fuder calls believers to shift the focus from inside the church building to those who live in the community.

Best practices and sample surveys will be available in this resource as explorers will look through the lens of Scripture to give practical steps to exegete the community and consider best practices of:

- What is a neighborhood map/Community Analysis?
- When should this map/analysis be created?
- Why should we map our neighborhood?
- Who is on the map and who is a part of this analysis?
- Where are the borders of this map/analysis?
- How does one conduct a community analysis?

A SIMPLE SOLUTION

It's no secret that our world is changing rapidly around us. We often are more accepting of societal change around the world than across the street. Yet God has placed your church in a specific location so that you might impact your community with cosmic significant and locally specific actions.

If your church is going to be an active presence in your community, you can't sit behind closed doors, waiting for the neighborhood to come to you. You must step out, engaging those around you and seeking to understand their hopes, dreams, and needs.

In order to minister to your community, you need to not only know how to interpret the Bible, but also how to engage with and adapt to those for whom the gospel message is addressed.

When we exegete a community, we draw meaning from it. We discover the underlying history, context, and culture of that place and its people.

Analyzing our communities enables us to explore and rediscover our surroundings. Once we make sense of our context, we can begin to "diagnose" needs and apply the proper "dose" of the gospel to meet those opportunities. Community analysis is the methodology and vehicle to rediscover our missional mandate in the church: to proclaim and demonstrate the gospel. The focus shifts from those inside the building to those outside – it is about the people we seek to reach. We must help our people see that "neighbor love" is an important part of following Jesus, and that moves us to find ways to know our neighbors in order to minister to and serve them well.

Community analysis is a four-step process; it's what I call the **4Ss**: supplication, stakeholders,

surveys, and stories.

Supplication – before we do anything else in our communities, we seek, individually and corporately, God's direction and leading.

Stakeholders – focus on people within the community with whom we can partner or network, such as neighborhood leaders, social services, schools, or businesses.

Surveys – through questionnaires and gathering focus groups, we get a stronger idea of our neighbor's felt needs, worldviews, and attitudes toward church and faith in general.

Stories – gather the stories we hear through those questionnaires and interviews and put them into case studies to get a fuller picture of our neighbors so that we can better minister and reach out to them.

- John Fuder, *Neighborhood Mapping*

A NEXT STEP

Prior to your next leadership team meeting, distribute this SUMS Remix to members of your team and ask them to read through it and be prepared to work on Solution #1 using the 4S guide as outlined above. Spend 15 minutes in each of the following sections, using the listed questions as a springboard for great discussion. Before moving on to the next section, identify one team action or next step, and one individual next step. Also be sure someone is documenting the conversation and key ideas that emerge.

Supplication – seeking God's direction and leading

- In your personal prayer life, are you specifically naming individuals and needs of your community?
- In your leadership team's prayer life, are you specifically naming individuals and needs of your community?
- In your corporate prayer life, are you specifically naming individuals and needs of your community?
- Commit to one specific action both individually and corporately that you will undertake in the area of Supplication in the next week.

Stakeholders – seeking community and neighborhood partners

- Do you have individual or a network of community leaders with whom you maintain a regular connection?
- If not, do you know where or how to obtain names of such individuals?
- Do you have a local governmental connection that you maintain regular contact with?
- Assuming you have connections described above, how often do you connect with them? Do you seek information from them or primarily use the connection as an information flow from you to them?

- In connections with the individuals listed above, do you have a mechanism in place to regularly listen to and develop a deeper understanding of their concerns?
- Assuming you have such a mechanism, how do you take action on their concerns?
- Commit to one specific action both individually and corporately that you will undertake in the area of Stakeholders in the next week.

Surveys – seeking information that helps reveal our communities understanding of our church specifically and faith generally

- Has your church ever conducted a community survey of any type? If so, when was it done? How was the information used?
- Do you have knowledge of the resources needed to conduct a community survey? If not, do you know where to get the resources?
- If you were to look at the community around you, can you identify specific segments that might need different types of surveys? If so, what are they?
- Commit to one specific action both individually and corporately that you will undertake in the area of Surveys in the next week.

Stories – collecting the stories arising out of the actions listed above

- Do you know where to go and who to listen to in order to hear the stories of your community?
- Have you really listened to the stories of the community around you from people actually involved in them? How did that make you feel?
- Compare those stories to any stories that make up part of your church's history and heritage. Do they coincide, or are they vastly different?
- Consider specific ways you will gather stories from your community through active listening, surveys, or guided conversations.
- Commit to one specific action both individually and corporately that you will undertake in the area of Stories in the next week.

Your community is not frozen in time; it is constantly changing. Your work of community analysis must also be done over and over again. It is never a “one and done” thing. To learn more about congregational and community survey resources, [start a conversation with the Auxano team today](#).

Taken from SUMS Remix 21-1, published August 2015.

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