

You Can't Love a City if You Don't Know a City, Part 2

Last week, I started a new series on city research and analysis. I will be taking several approaches, with examples and case studies along the way. And, feel free to suggest resources in the comments that would be helpful to include.

Part of knowing a city is knowing its churches. I will share more on that later from three separate studies, but knowing a city's church plants generally requires a different approach. Recently, Todd Wilson shared what I think is one of the best studies of its kind-- looking at church planting in a region.

The study, Church Planting in the Washington DC and Baltimore Corridor area, was put together by Ron Johnson, Director of Accelerate. Accelerate is an alliance of church planting churches, networks, and denominations for the purpose of accelerating church planting in the Washington/Baltimore corridor.

I will be sharing it in several parts. First is an introduction to the report. See my comments at the end.

The State of Church Planting in the Washington DC / Baltimore Corridor 2005-2010 Why this Research?

A group of like-minded church planting leaders and ministries in the Washington - Baltimore metro area is seeking to collaboratively support church planting. The group seeks to champion the cause of church planting while minimizing organizational structures and overhead. These leaders are seeking to continue the work God is already doing through each of them while also looking for ways to work collaboratively to enhance the effectiveness of church planting in the geographic area.

The group is coming together as the Accelerate Alliance. The Accelerate mission is to:

- Attract, inspire and equip Kingdom-minded leaders and
- Connect them so they can
- Collaborate with their time, talent and treasure to
- Accelerate the creation of healthy, reproducing faith communities resulting in transformed lives and transformed communities

The first step in discerning the approach and strategy of Accelerate was to research and discover what God is already doing in church planting in the Washington DC / Baltimore metropolitan areas. A primary goal of the initial research was to discover how best to accelerate church planting in the area.

The vision for Accelerate was conceived and birthed by New Life Christian Church who has funded the initial work on Accelerate via Ron Johnson's (the Director) time. Accelerate is a pilot initiative closely aligned with New Life and with Exponential (a non-profit national ministry that

exists to champion church planting and who runs the Exponential Conference).

Healthy church plants start with spiritually, physically, and emotionally healthy church planters. We anticipate that the best path to accelerating planting in our area is through serving church planters. These findings will help guide us to determine how we best fulfill our mission and therefore advance the Kingdom.

Survey / Research Approach

Research was conducted to identify as many of the new churches planted in the last 5 years in the Washington DC / Baltimore metro area as possible. Denominational and network leaders were called, searches on the internet were conducted, school systems were asked for names of churches meeting in schools, and church planters were asked what other church planters they knew. 81 phone interviews were conducted with church planters, pastors of church planting churches and denominational leaders. There were 25 appointments with church planters. 15 church services were also attended to get a feel for the ministries of the new churches.

As part of the research questions were asked to discern the tensions and needs of church planters.

A team of church planting influencers from denominations, networks, church planting churches, and church planters met to review what was being learned and offer input toward meeting the needs of church planters.

Acknowledgments

This was an exhaustive search involving nearly 1/2 year of a person's effort. However some limitations were recognized:

- It is difficult finding and connecting with many churches under five years old. For example, over half of the churches meeting in schools in one county did not have an EIN number with the government, a web site, a yellow pages listing, or a white pages listing
- It is difficult identifying non-English language / nationality churches because of the language barrier and they often do not use traditional advertising. Some of the non-English / nationality churches are used to maintaining a low profile in their own countries, so they take the same posture in the US
- Many new churches remain under the care and financial oversight of a sponsoring church so records of them are more difficult to find
- New independent churches with bi-vocational pastors are often hard to identify
- The scope of the survey does not identify smaller faith communities like house churches that are not meeting in public places or can't be found publically
- These numbers represent surviving churches and don't reflect others that did not make it to five years.

Observations of Demographic Populations that are Growing the Most

The diversity of the population continues to grow as people move here from all over the country and the world. Although different populations are often concentrated in areas, the population of the Washington DC / Baltimore corridor is one of the most integrated of cities in the country. The "church" often lags behind the culture in its response to demographic shifts.

These points are made by observation and talking to other church/denominational leaders. The 2010 census data detail is not yet published and the 2000 census would not reflect a lot of this change.

These demographic populations are growing the most.

- Outer suburbs - although the economy slowdown greatly slowed down this trend
- Hispanic population both in inner cities and older suburbs
- Suburban African America population in Maryland
- One denominational leader pointed to a growing African population in the city replacing the African Americans moving to the suburbs (this does not show up in a census study)
- First generation immigrants in older suburbs and inner city whose first language is not English
- 1.5 and 2nd generation children of immigrants everywhere who straddle culture but who experience life primarily in English
- Urban centers with many high rise apartments especially near subway stops that are filled with young adults who are predominantly Caucasian, but also Asian and African American
- Although the inner city poor population is not growing, it is becoming increasingly isolated from the church as thriving inner-city African American churches move to the suburbs to follow their constituents who are becoming middle class

This type of study is not intended to give you percents like a poll does, but it is an important and helpful approach in research. They have given their methodology (and you should be skeptical when research has no methodology). They have told you their limitations (and if they know those, it is a better project). The end result is a helpful look at planing in this area... more soon on that this week.

The next post on this case study will focus on the Executive Summary, who is planting churches, and the role of denominations and networks in church planting.

Interested in this series? Read Part 1 [here](#); go to Part 3 [here](#).

Read more from Ed [here](#).