


CONTENTS

Foreword	7
Preface	11
Introduction: How Relevant Is Your Church?	13
CHAPTER 1 <i>Case Study</i> : One Church’s Success Story: Adapting to the Growing Latino Community	17
Top Ten Tips to Exegete a Culture	21
CHAPTER 2 The “What”	25
<i>Case Study</i> : Mobilizing our Youth	32
CHAPTER 3 The “Why”	35
<i>Case Study</i> : Partnering with a Local School	44
CHAPTER 4 The “Who”	47
<i>Case Study</i> : Multiethnic Community Church Plant.	58
CHAPTER 5 The “Where”	61
<i>Case Study</i> : Multisite Campus-based Ministry	73
CHAPTER 6 The “When”.	75
<i>Case Study</i> : Local Church Outreach in Ethnically and Economically Changing Neighborhoods	82
CHAPTER 7 The “How”.	85
<i>Case Study</i> : Engaging a Suburban Church with Local Need	101
Appendix 1: The Life History Interview	105
Appendix 2: Survey Best Practices	107
Appendix 3: Sample Survey Questions according to Category	109
Appendix 4: Sample Survey, Learning a Neighborhood’s Beliefs and Worldviews.	123
Appendix 5: Sample Survey, Felt Needs of a Community and the Attitudes toward the Church	127
Appendix 6: Sample Survey, College Campuses.	131
Appendix 7: Sample Ethnographies.	135
Notes	153
Acknowledgments	155

Chapter 1

ONE CHURCH'S SUCCESS STORY: ADAPTING TO THE GROWING LATINO COMMUNITY



Our neighborhoods are in a continual state of change. God is sending the nations to our cities and as Christ-followers embedded in local churches we are, at times, overwhelmed in how to respond. Pastor David Potete, one of my former graduate students and longtime friend and ministry comrade in the Belmont-Cragin (Bel-Cragin) neighborhood on Chicago's Northwest Side, talked to me recently about the learning curve in working with his church to engage the community. His journey serves as a blueprint for us as we study and serve our changing communities. Here is his story.

I knew the importance of understanding demographics and the need to know the community the church is trying to reach. So when I and a few others planted Northwest Community Church in Chicago in 1991, I spent \$600 on a demographic study of our neighborhood. But even with that knowledge, I had no idea the stunning value exegeting our community would have on the life of our church. In 2005 as

part of my graduate studies, I took Dr. Fuder's class on community analysis. While it gave me a better understanding of what it means to be a student of my community, it only paved the way to the greater firsthand knowledge that came a year later when Dr. Fuder asked me if his graduate class could partner with our church to do a community analysis of our neighborhood.

Of course, I said yes. I knew I would learn more about the area I served. I met with the graduate students, discussed the neighborhood as I understood it, and worked with the class to develop a survey. The experience was informative and enlightening, since it challenged me to articulate my perceptions in a way I had not previously been forced to.

We surveyed the neighborhood, the grad class tabulated the results, and presented a booklet with several suggestions to our church. Though I was grateful for the experience, I didn't expect some great insight that would revolutionize our church.

At the time Northwest Community Church was 85 percent Caucasian, 10 percent Latino, and 5 percent African-American. Being in the predominantly Latino neighborhood of Bel-Cragin, it was obvious to

everyone that we needed to become more Spanish-speaking in our services. We made some effort, but admittedly, it was not very intentional. And not very effective. The most we usually did was to occasionally sing a song or read a Scripture in Spanish.

When our church was presented with the community analysis report, however, we felt as if it were a smack in the face. It helped us understand our community as we never had before. It clarified where we were. And it made it crystal clear to us where we needed to go.

Even simply pointing out the demographic makeup of Bel-Cragin in the report was eye-opening. Though we knew the demographics by experience, to see it in black and white on the page was critical. The report's recommendations made it clear we must be bilingual. Community analysis gave us insights that truly revolutionized our church!

THOUGH WE KNEW THE DEMOGRAPHICS BY EXPERIENCE, TO SEE IT IN BLACK AND WHITE ON THE PAGE WAS CRITICAL.

With the report and our new knowledge and understanding of our neighborhood, the first thing we did was to revisit and develop a theology of the nations for our church. We already had that kind of theology for our international missions, but it was lacking for missions around our block. We studied passages in Scripture and concluded that our mandate to make disciples starts right on our street! We now hold the conviction that we are to be a truly multiethnic, multicultural, and multilingual church. Part of that conviction is that we now hold bilingual services with Spanish and English combined in the same service.

We realized that if we wanted to serve and reach our community—as our name suggests—we had to make deliberate and intentional changes. In fact, our associate pastor, Gowdy Cannon, took the results so seriously that he traveled to Peru for a month to immerse himself in Spanish. We developed a translation team and began translating our flyers, bulletins, website, and worship slides into Spanish. We also invested in an FM transmission system to provide live translation through headphones.

Next we looked at our sanctuary's setup. The chairs faced the stage at the front of the sanctuary. One Sunday we moved the chairs into four sections with each section facing the center of the room. Instead of standing on the stage to preach, I stood in the center of the floor. When I was seated, I looked directly at my brothers and sisters worshipping. The first time I saw the joy of my Latino church family worshipping in their heart language confirmed to me that what we were doing was pleasing to God and a blessing to others. We now rearrange the chairs for this type of setup several times a year.

We still have a long way to go. Our attendance is now about 35 percent Latino, 5 percent African-American, 50 percent Caucasian, and a smattering of everything else.

There is no doubt in my mind we have become more of the church God wants us to be as a result of engaging in community analysis. And we are committed to reengaging in that type of analysis every few

years to stay on track.

I thought I knew my community, and I did to a degree. However, the process of community analysis clarified, crystalized, and truly changed our approach to fulfilling the Great Commission in our neighborhood.



Armed with knowledge, understanding, and the Holy Spirit's guidance, we too can go out into our communities to meet people where they are and introduce them to the gospel. Let's get started.

TOP TEN TIPS TO EXEGETE A CULTURE¹

As we start unpacking exactly what neighborhood mapping, or community analysis, is and how to do it, let the following step-by-step process guide your journey. We'll go more in-depth with each of these in the following chapters.

1. Go as a Learner

Assume a position to understand, not judge the neighborhood. This requires humility, persistence, and the courage to push past your fears. An accepting and inquisitive posture can open doors into another culture. Linguist and missions author Betty Sue Brewster's steps of cultural learning is helpful here: Come as a learner, find ways to serve, seek to form friendships, weave God's story into their story, and bathe everything in prayer.²

2. Seek Out an "Informant"

Find an individual who is a gatekeeper, an insider, a "[person] of peace" (Luke 10:6). This is someone who will let you into his lifestyle or subculture. He is an expert who can teach you about his journey as "lived experience." She is a model (albeit imperfect!) of another belief or practice and can connect you to that world.

3. Build a Relationship

As much as you can, be a "participant observer"³ in that person's life, culture, and activities. A relationship, growing into a friendship, is key because in it a "trust-bond"⁴ is formed, and trust is the collateral of cross-cultural ministry. In the process, God is at work to break your heart for that community (see Matt. 9:13; Luke 13:34).

4. Use an Interview Guide

You may not always "stay on script," but it is helpful to work from an outline. You could apply the same categories already provided and then adapt the questions (see appendix 1) within them to meet your specific needs.

5. Analyze Your Data

Depending on the formality of your community analysis, you will in all likelihood end up with some form of “field notes.” A crucial step, often neglected, is to examine your data for holes, patterns, or hooks. What missing pieces could your informant fill in? What interests, activities, or values are recurrent themes? Is there anything you could use to enter your informant’s world more deeply?

6. Filter through a Biblical Worldview

What Scriptures speak to the information you are discovering? What does the Bible say about the activities, lifestyles, and beliefs you are exegeting or reading in your neighborhood? What would Jesus do, or have you do, in response to the needs? A biblical framework is your strongest platform on which to mobilize your church/ministry/school to action.

7. Expand into the Broader Community

Your informant can act as a “culture broker” to give you entry into the additional lifestyles and subcultures within the broader community. As you learn to “read your audience” (become “streetwise”) and develop credibility in the neighborhood, you can leverage those relational contacts into greater exposure and deeper familiarity with the needs in your area.

8. Network Available Resources

As your awareness of the community grows, you will invariably feel overwhelmed by all there is to do, missionally speaking! You do not have to reinvent the wheel. Is anyone else working with that audience? Can you partner with another church, ministry, or agency? With whom can you share and gather resources and information?

9. Determine What God Is Calling You to Do

With your newly acquired knowledge about your community, what do you do now? Plant a church? Start a new ministry? Refocus your

current programs? Much of your response will depend upon your personnel and resources. But you are now poised to do relevant, kingdom-building work in your community.

10. Continually Evaluate, Study, Explore

Our hope in Christ is firm, but everything and everyone around us is in constant motion. Is your neighborhood changing (again)? Who is God bringing to your community now? Is your church or ministry responsive to those opportunities? Are you winsome, relevant, engaging? We must always ask these questions, in every generation, in order to “serve the purpose of God” (Acts 13:36).

