

Who Is My Neighbor?

Conducting a Demographic Analysis and
Needs-based Survey in Your Context



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WHO IS MY NEIGHBOR?

I live inside city limits and I have neighbors. One set of neighbors keep pigeons caged in their front lawn surrounded by rusted and tarped masses of unused junk as well as house four large white Shepherds in their back yard that bark incessantly twenty hours a day and often howl in tune with sirens of emergency vehicles traveling to the local ER. Another neighbor is an elderly house-bound woman who seems to be watching me from her windows each time I am in my yard. Across the street, a paradoxical couple lives with their rusty pickup truck, lumber lining their small back yard, very few teeth remaining in their mouths, and a brown designer-dog Chihuahua mix named “Queenie.” Another neighbor always seems to have a revolving door of teenagers coming and going and causing their driveway to more closely resemble a parking lot. These are my neighbors. These are the people whom I see almost daily and whom I speak to quite often. I may not love everything about them, but one thing I have seen from each one of these neighbors is that they are looking out for me. They care about my wellbeing and have showed love to us in unexpected ways. When a smoke alarm was sounding at my home one evening when I was burning dinner, one neighbor ran to our home to make sure we were safe. Another neighbor has offered to help my husband with mechanical technicalities he is not so inclined toward. Another has thanked us repeatedly for moving into our dilapidated home and beginning repairs. Yet another brought me a significant savings coupon to a local store in hopes that I could use it toward my grocery bill. Their love, as unexpected as it was, gives me only a partial glimpse of loving one’s neighbor.

So who is my neighbor? This question is paramount to understanding how we, as the Church, are called to respond in relationship with those around us. In the passage of Luke 10:25-37, Jesus gives us our rule for life: to love God and to love our neighbor as ourselves. The

ensuing parable of “The Good Samaritan” brings to life the reality of love for one’s neighbor. We can learn many things about loving our neighbor from this passage, but three really shine through.

First, we read that, regardless of how wrong it is, our lack of love is easily justified. The priest and the Levite (another Jewish holy man by virtue of his tribe) simply “passed by” the man in need. They saw him, that is explicit from the text, but they avoided the ceremonial uncleanliness and the hassle of stopping to help in favor of their apparently more important tasks up the road further. As a Christian, there are those people whom we find easier to love – our families, our church friends, our pastor, those whom we associate with or know well, etc. For these folks, we are more inclined to give, to stop, to sacrifice. For those we do not find so easy to love – the drug dealer, the prostitute, a difficult coworker, the disabled or elderly, a person who we have never met before, or someone of another race or gender – we justify our “passing by” with offhand excuses of busy schedules and prior commitments. This passage shows us the sinfulness of our own justifications for not engaging others with love, regardless of who they are.

Another truth in this passage is that our neighbors are diverse. I have always assumed that the man in need in this parable was of Jewish heritage. This is why it was so shocking that another Jew, be it priest or Levite, would not give aid to this man. Instead, Jesus, as he so adeptly does with his re-working of Jewish parables, gives a twist to the conclusion. A Samaritan man, of mosaic racial and cultural heritage, is the one who denies himself in order to show love to his neighbor. Considered an outcast by Jewish standards, this Samaritan could have justified his “passing by” probably more so than any other person in this story. Because of the inferiority and oppression afflicted on the Samaritan people, the only responsibility of this man in response to the beaten man’s need was an obligation to the commandment that sums up

all of the Law: to love God and to love neighbor. Looking closely at the meaning of the word “neighbor”, the Greek text given is *plasion* (pronounced play-see-on). The Luke 10 passage is the only instance in this gospel where this specific definition of “neighbor” is used. According to the lexicon, there are four diverse meanings for who our neighbor is:

(1) A friend.

(2) Any other person, and where two are concerned, the other person, your fellow man.

(3) According to the Jews, any member of the Hebrew nation and commonwealth.

(4) According to Christ, any other man irrespective of nation or religion with whom we live or whom we chance to meet.¹


Finally, our passage shows that needs are everywhere. This man’s need was evident in a public way, allowing the others to make the conscious decision of whether or not to show love to their neighbor. When we see poverty, need, or injustice in any fashion, we are now faced with the choice for action or inaction in a conscious way. As Christians, we also need to be aware that our neighbors may have needs that are privately kept quiet. As we love our neighbors, we must intentionally choose to engage those around us to be able to best love and serve them in whatever they might be in need of. This same Law is our obligation, but also our delight. It is a delight to know that our loving words and actions, no matter how big or small, public or private, can save someone’s life, whether physically, emotionally, socially, or spiritually. There is a diverse population with diverse needs and, as the Church, we should delight in creatively loving and serving each one.

¹ www.crosswalk.com – see Bible Study tools under Greek Lexicon: *Greek lexicon based on Thayer's and Smith's Bible Dictionary plus others; also referenced TDNT in article. These files are public domain.*

Following this, I have compiled some written and organizational-based resources for you to consider as your congregation seeks to understand its' context to understand the racial, gender, educational, relational, and even socio-economical variety living in your area. **Be encouraged** then, as you and your congregation consider this question: Who is our neighbor? As you discover who your neighbors are, **be aware** of the temptation to justify why you are not showing love to them. **Be challenged** to expand your definition of neighbor as you reach out in love to a diverse population of needs and experiences. And **be intentional** as you assess the needs of others and how your congregation can best show Christ's love to your community.



As you prepare for and embark upon the process of sleuthing your neighborhood, there are some resources you may want to check out first. Hopefully these will provide you and your congregation with practical ways to be aware of who lives in your community. They offer a variety of tools and ideas for understanding your congregation's context.

 Appel, Gene, Jim Mellado, and Alan Nelson. **How to Change Your Church (Without Killing It)**. Word Publishing. Nashville, TN. 2000.

- *Any commitment to understanding better your community make-up or needs will inevitably necessitate some change. Appel, Mellado, and Nelson work to provide a guide to creating lasting change in your congregation in the least painful way.*

They understand the need for change as the church and world is ever-shifting and hope to motivate congregations toward both the internal and external work that it will take to continually become the Body of Christ. With a heavy focus on strategic planning and team building, the authors explore individual and corporate motivations. In proposition of deeper systemic change, this book moves beyond simple improvements and explores past and future traditions, a plan for transition, the role of leaders in the process, managing conflict well, and the ultimate benefits to the change. Important also is the section that brings to light the emotional, often painful, face of change and gives poignant suggestions for dealing tenderly yet firmly with these sentiments.

 **Dunn, Heather, Cheri R. Gillard, and Gina Leuthauser. Field Guide to Neighborhood Outreach. Group Publishing. Loveland, Colorado. 2007.**

- *Dunn, Gillard, and Leuthauser come together to put out one of the easiest to read and implement books for neighborhood outreach. It is best implemented in suburban or urban contexts. With many great ideas for building community relationships, these one page ideas are accessible for most people to latch on to. The book offers a variety of outreach ideas, ranging from one-time events, to weekend long events, to regular, monthly events that could be held to build relationships and community. With short, practical ideas of how to meet and engage others around you, this book is a great lay resource for encouraging people in the congregation to build relationships with others. There is a particularly encouraging nine page section about reaching out to your neighborhood that offers ideas and shares in the successes of others who have gone before us in putting these ideas to the test.*

 **Holland, Joe and Peter Henriot. Social Analysis: Linking Faith and Justice. Center for Concern Washington D.C. and Orbis Books Maryknoll, New York. 1983.**

- *In a text specifically designed to look at the social constructs of American society, authors Holland and Henriot offer an introductory look at the relationship between the church and society. Written from the Catholic tradition, this resource communicates such a perspective on the injustice of our society that*

necessitates and elicits a solid response of social justice on the part of the reader. This book has been filed in the national Library of Congress as a federal resource despite its faith-based origins and, despite its age, works to provide visionary and directional food for thought in the contemporary context. When we consider injustice in our communities, racial or otherwise, we approach with what the authors differentiate as either “academically” or “pastorally.” Academic, as is so often thought with minimal social action, is polarized from the pastoral perspective which takes population analysis further. With a strong theological and biblical analysis of what is happening in society, our churches can then begin pastoral and ministerial planning for how we are responsible to take action as the Body of Christ.

✦ Jackson, Larry and Michael Fletcher. **Beyond Reconciliation: How to Establish Long-Lasting, Life-Giving Relationships Across Racial Boundaries.** Wagner Publications. 2001.

- *At only sixty-four pages in length, this book follows the relationship journey between two ministry leaders as they seek to live out a long-lasting, life-giving relationship with someone of another race. Jackson, a pastor at Bethel Outreach International Church, and Fletcher, pastor at Manna Church and Romanian church planter, collaborate to ask tough questions to get the race dialogue started. In this book, they ask such questions as: Why are so few people experiencing “covenant relationships” with someone of another race? Why are there so few truly multiethnic churches? Where is the tension and response surrounding hate crimes? Jackson and Fletcher recognize the importance of meetings and discussions, but also know that these are not enough to truly embody systemic organizational change. The book begins with a foundational understanding of God’s perspective of reconciliation and then moves on to discuss the necessary leadership and practical steps to facilitate real reconciliation. Finally, Jackson and Fletcher encourage readers to engage in active relationships in a counter cultural way.*

➤ Mann, Alice. **The In-Between Church**. Alban Institute. 1998.

- *With ease of engagement and accessibility of this resource, both in audience and price, this book offers benefits for understanding times of transition in the church. Geared toward both clergy and laity, Mann's text clearly captures the frustration of transition and change. She explores growth changes, both growing and declining, as well as other transitional fluctuations in the church in response to fluctuating changes in the environment in which the church finds itself. As the church engages the possibility, or necessity, of transition, Mann asks and discusses major issues such as: should we add or remove a worship service, should we hire or downsize (more) staff, and what will it take to change. As the church seeks solutions to these questions and more, Mann writes to provide faithful resolutions to the trials and tribulations of a church evolving.*

➤ McMahan, Candace and Jan Kerschner. **Group's Body Building Guide to Outreach: Stretching out to Your Community**. Group Publishing. Loveland, Colorado. 2006.

- *Group Publishing, a major curriculum development team for many Christian education materials, has devised a clever resource for congregations who may not know how to get started in community outreach once they know the needs of the community. This curriculum, designed to be implemented as church outreach programs are based on Group's core values of Relational, Experiential, Applicable, and Learner-based. The purpose is two-fold: to reach out in the community and to engage the hearts of those in your congregation as they build relationships with others in the community. With about 15 different outreach program ideas delineated in this book, this is a must-have resource for anyone wanting to reach their neighbor. Here are some of the focus groups that this resource targets for outreach: single moms, sports fans, teens, cancer patients, nursing home residents, young readers, developmentally challenged adults, firefighters, teachers, church visitors, latchkey kids, and the homeless. This book also offers ideas for outreaches to neighborhoods or communities as a whole. Above all, McMahan and Kerschner stress that relationships are the key to*

outreach since loving relationships last much longer than any of the material things that fade so quickly.


📌 Namboodiri, Krishnan. **A Primer on Population Dynamics.** 1st edition. Springer Publishers. 1996.

- *Namboodiri wrote this book with the average (but committed) reader in mind. This book, albeit over 300 pages, is very readable from the selections that I choose to read in reviewing this resource. A self-proclaimed textbook for students of demography, sociology, public health, and population, this accessible text works to show us the value of understanding and applying the study of population dynamics. Based upon the premise that population affects everything you do, whether directly or indirectly, Namboodiri's text engages issues such as birth and death rates, migration, familial dynamics and household composition, and the make-up, spread, and growth of the population. It may pique your interest to also tackle topics such as population's affects on the environment and natural resources or governmental policies related to population. In a helpful question-answer flow, this author engages you in dialogue about these important topics that concern population. Each question then gives a detailed explanation and additional resources to consider. Overall, this would be a great tool for leaders to use in educating themselves and others about the population dynamics present and how it is related to them.*

📌 Schlabach, Gerald. **And Who is My Neighbor? Poverty, Privilege, and the Gospel of Christ.** Herald Press. Pennsylvania. 1990.

- *Story after story of encounters with poverty and the poor who are always with us provide the stepping stones through this text. Schlabach emphasizes the value of friendship with the poor, hospitality to the poor, and sharing with the poor. He specifically takes readers through various Scripture texts, such as the Sermon on the Mount, the Good Samaritan, and various understandings of wealth in the Bible in order to have a solid theological understanding of poverty and our responsibility therein. The final chapters have social justice flare as they offer resources for both local and global change through action. Schlabach looks at*

hot-button justice topics such as unjust economics, militarism, the environment, sexism, and racism. An encouragement to action, this resource offers a more thorough Biblical understanding of who our neighbor is.

 Stetzer, Ed and David Putman. **Breaking the Missional Code: Your Church Can Become a Missionary in your Community.** Broadman and Holman Publishing. Nashville, TN. 2006.

- *Stetzer and Putman really do encourage breaking away from traditional understandings of step by step approaches to community ministry. Instead, they encourage that congregations begin to understand themselves and their context in order to allow strategies of ministry to naturally emerge in the most effective ways. Churches are called to act as missionaries in their local communities. By recognizing that there are both spiritual and cultural barriers to mission, Stetzer and Putman take seriously the missional call to the emerging global context. Through the mandate of the Great Commission, the authors focus on becoming missional, allowing strategies to naturally emerge, and revitalizing the ministries you currently offer. They also focus on the types of values that churches and leaders must have in order to break the missional code. Stetzer and Putman also name the tension between outreach and faithfulness to the faith through tradition, theology, and praxis.*

When your congregation is committed to the vision of seeking out the needs of the community, one especially helpful way to find out what people need is to ask. There are several resources available to guide you in actualizing this survey process.

 Waclawski, Janine and Allan H. Church. **Designing and Using Organizational Surveys.** Gower Publishing. Brookfield, Vermont. 1998.

- *Written by a team of consultants from the W Warner Burke Associates consulting firm in New York, these authors are experts in designing, implementing, and interpreting large-scale surveys for organizations. If your congregation wants a top-notch resource for the survey process, this is a resource invaluable to your*

journey. Church and Waclawski walk through a seven step model. First, they will help your church in identifying resources and setting goals for your survey. Second, you will learn the importance asking key questions and other important tips on syntax to ensure that the information you receive will be what you seek as you draft your survey. Third, a focus on communicating with the group to be surveyed and announcing the survey will be discussed. Fourth, you will learn about the various aspects of giving the survey including: timing, response rate, and sampling versus census differences. Fifth, you will engage in interpreting the data, be it specific items or general conceptual themes that emerged from the survey. Next, effective methods for compiling your findings and giving clear reports will be described in detail. And finally, translating your information into a plan of action will be linked to planning, performance, and commitment. This practical guide will provide you with the tools to diagnose community needs and to find solutions within your congregation and resources.

There are also online resources available which will help your congregation as you seek to understand the demographic makeup of your community, assess the needs therein, and to plan strategically for the future. Also, there are encouraging actions taking place in many denominations that your congregation can get involved with or inspired by.

 www.census.gov

- *This is the federal resource for all demographic data for the entire country. This will be the guaranteed resource for any town or place you can possibly want to learn about. Currently, all census data is from the 2000 census. With the upcoming 2010 census quickly approaching, it will be interesting to see if the projections on this website for population and growth are accurate. They even give the latest age, race, and ethnic updates. You can customize your information*

by selecting the type of search or the area you would like to have access to the information concerning. Overall, this is a very generic but accurate database of the entire country.

 www.melissadata.com/lookups

- *Talk about your one-stop shopping! Free to the public, this website offers an enormous database of information. Including much of the demographic information from Census 2000, this website also offers many valuable resources to the task of reaching one's neighborhood including, but not limited to: addresses, labor statistics, tax statistics, crime statistics, public school statistics, local non-profit information, and tons of maps including census tract maps and neighborhood maps for the majority of the United States.*

 www.epodunk.com

- *Profiling over 46000 United States cities, this website also has information regarding reviews of various areas, reports and rankings, community and county profiles, ancestry maps, and links to public records. With focus on festivals, heritages, and family immigration history, this website offers an array of resources for digging deeper into the roots of the community while also enjoying its current fruit.*

 www.keysurvey.com

- *This is an online survey software that will aid your congregation in designing an effective needs assessment for your community. With a free 30-day trial before any expense is incurred, this resource is worth checking out.*

 <http://extension.usu.edu/files/SGuide.pdf>

- *This online Community Needs Assessment Guide pdf file is free for public use as published by Utah State University. It is only one example of many sample surveys that are posted online for assessing community needs. I would suggest gathering several of these types of guides and actual assessments in order to compile an accurate survey.*

 <http://www.lcgr.net>

- *Also known as City Vision, this organization partners with non-profits, businesses, and churches for strategic planning in the revitalization of urban and suburban areas. Earl James, now working with the RCA's diversity initiatives, was pivotal in setting this organization into motion and was my initial introduction to this resource.*
- *Just a hint for those of us NOT living in Grand Rapids, MI...If you use a major search engine, such as Google, you come across many consulting organizations that are geared toward helping non-profits and ministries plan strategically for ministry and community outreach all across this nation.*

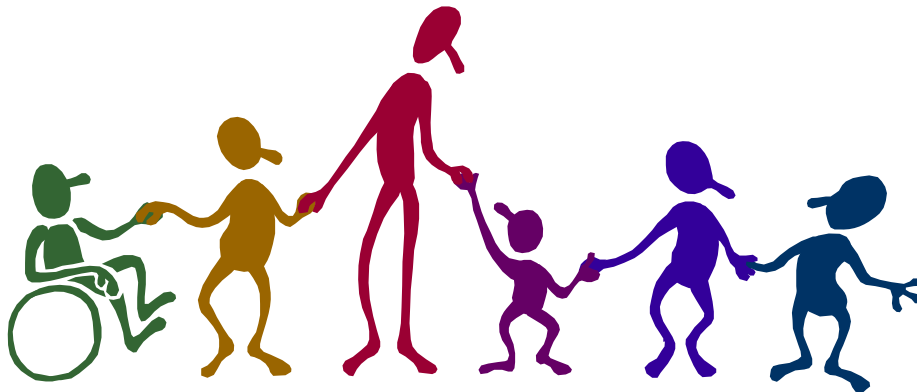
 **Other Suggested on-line searches:**

- Local faith or organization-based consulting groups for strategic planning in your area
- Other denominational websites (such as PCUSA, RCA, CRC, Lutheran, Baptist, Methodist, UCC, Episcopal, Catholic, ect) that outline the ways that others in the church are reaching out to their communities in intentional ways. These can give

some interesting perspectives and generate some ideas for what your congregation can do in your area as well.

🚩 Suggested Partners for Community Outreach

- Salvation Army or charitable donation ministries that gives aid to the poor
- Local food pantry ministries
- Gospel Mission or halfway houses
- Homeless Shelters – both men and women/children
- Juvenile homes, jails, or prisons
- Homes for runaways
- Abuse shelters or YMCA/YWCA
- Social work agencies and caseworkers
- Department of Community Health – these people have the inside track on people who live in your community and what needs are present.



Taylor Russell
Race in the American Church
Interview Summaries
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Interview #1:

The first interview was with a good friend from high school. Jessica is half white, half Latina. As long as I have known her, Jessie has called herself “Latina” and is unashamed of her race. She grew up in Kalamazoo, Michigan, attended Kalamazoo Christian High School, and Haven Reformed Church. She later completed her undergrad in Education with a second major in Spanish and is now married to a white youth pastor and is a school teacher in the greater Chicagoland area. She specifically teaches English-spanish classes for latino students integrating into the American culture.

When did you first realize a problem with race in the church?

→ Jessie shared that it was not church that first made her aware of her race, but her white, maternal grandparents. According to Jessie, they rejected their daughter for marrying a Latino man and in turn rejected both of their grandchildren resulting from that union. Jess remembers hearing her cousins talk about how grandma and grandpa “hated them because they were spics.” She admits to much pain from that, especially from the broken relationship between her mother and them, but attributes much of her Latina pride to that as well. When it came to church and school, Jessie’s parents were very adamant on Christian education and involvement with the Christian community. She was always acutely aware of her skin color and her heritage, especially in a white setting, but says she never felt nearly the rejection that her grandparents had inflicted on them.

What was most problematic about your experiences in the Christian community in regard to your race?

→ Dating and grades were her answers. Jessie said that she felt that she was never asked out on dates by the white boys because of her skin color and dark hair. She once tried dying her hair blonde, but said that she felt so ridiculous that it did not even last two days. In fact, it was not until college at BIOLA that Jessie ever had a date. When asked further about her grades, Jessie said she felt she was given preferential treatment in the classroom at KCHS because she was Latina. As one of very few minorities in the school system, Jessie said that anytime she questioned a teacher about a grade, with hopes to work harder or extra to improve it, teachers would almost always automatically raise her grade without much discussion. She did not think it was fair and felt like some of them were “afraid to give her an honest grade” because “they did not want ‘the minority student’ to do poorly in the school system.”

What was different about your experience of BIOLA?

→ The multicultural environment of the school was so different for Jessica. She loved being around other Latino people and, for the first time in her life, was asked out on dates by both

white and Latino boys. This Christian environment became a place of freedom for Jessie as she studied the Bible, Spanish, and Education. She said, “being outside of the bubble of West Michigan made it so much easier for me to see the racism in how I was treated. I never really realized how racist people are in Kalamazoo until I was outside of that environment to which I had become accustomed.”

Interview #2: Trading Spaces

The second interview was with a 23 year old female coworker from a mixed racial decent. Jaime is an unknown proportioned mix of black and Hispanic. Her dark curly (but not kinky) hair and almond eyes make it difficult to pinpoint any physical racial stereotypes. A self-proclaimed “Eskimo”, Jaime has been known by this self-given nickname since junior high. She grew up as one of 6 children of a white non-denominational pastor and his white wife in Montana. The youngest of all of the children, Jaime did not realize she was adopted until the age of four. At this time another child at the church asked her why her skin was so dark. It was that early memory of comparing skin color that Jaime points to as her first recollection of a “race experience” in the church.

What changed for you in that moment of realization?

→ According to Jaime, the feeling of being different was painful. She experienced rejection, but states she is unsure how long that rejection lasted, being that she was so young. She did admit to confusion regarding her adoption and indicated that in addition to the church experience being altered, her experience in her family life was also changed as she began asking many questions in her immediate family. Most of all, it began the separation from her mother, to whom she has been very close to, and, as Jaime sees it today, contributes to her poor relationship with her mother still.

How did that affect relationships with others in the church? (Be specific: positive/negative)

→ At first, Jaime did not really seem to notice many differences in how she was treated by other children. In fact, it was not until junior high that Jaime admits to truly recognizing how differently she was treated. She attended a predominately white school and most of her school friends were also her church friends. When the other girls started having “boyfriends” in the youth group, Jaime never had any. She said that it continued throughout high school, especially for dances and bigger social “date” events. She often went with other single girlfriends or a group of co-eds, but never had any dates. She said, “I wasn’t black, I wasn’t white...the black boys wouldn’t take me because I was white, but the white boys didn’t ask me ‘cuz I was black. It wasn’t fair and it was really hard.” It was during this time that Jaime began telling people that she was an “Eskimo” from Alaskan decent. She feels that this has made her more accepted in white circles.

In a positive perspective, Jaime felt valued by her friends and by the youth pastor and leaders. She pointed to one youth pastor in particular. Tom, a white male, and his wife Valerie did not shy away from asking Jaime about her experiences as were related to her skin color amidst a

predominately white environment. Jaime felt that this was an overall positive thing because she was able to share with them, and sometimes with other students, about how she felt.

What is your church experience today?

Jaime still attends a predominately white church when she attends. She does not live near her parents any longer after college. She went to Western Michigan University. She would say that she views herself as white or “Eskimo” and rarely admits to any black decent. When asked more about this, she believes it is more acceptable for her socially to be white or Eskimo than to be black in the church. She says that she would not even consider attending a black church because she has “worked so hard to not be known as the token black girl” that she fears she would undo all of her work.

- *She hides behind one racial identity in order to conceal another.*
 - *Fear of being “found out” and experiencing further rejection fuels her identity.*
 - *It was her experience of race that has contributed to a poor relationship with parents, especially her mother.*
-