

Targeting The Needs of
The Unchurched
in the City of
Woodbury, MN

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Abstract

The following is a research project conducted in the City of Woodbury, MN. It is an attempt to arrive at a few basic conclusions. The major conclusion that it attempts to discover is if there is a need for more study relative to the project's focus. This research is meant to be a "pilot" or "tickler," and is in no way to be intended as an exhaustive study of the subjects discussed. The desire of the researcher is to match the empirical data collected from similar studies done in other communities and match those results against those contained herein.

The project is also designed to allow the researcher to get out into the community and talk to the people. The hope is to cause someone who is not currently attending church to give some thought to the benefits of church attendance. It is hoped that through the use of the instrument, serious dialog will ensue that will lead to the development of personal relationships. The desire is that through these relationships, the respondents might come to a deeper level of commitment to godly principles than they had previously known.

Chapter One - Introduction

Purpose

The purpose of this project was to assess the pressing needs of the “unchurched” in the City of Woodbury with the extended purpose in determining what those surveyed would want in a church if they were looking for one to attend. The word “unchurched” does not just refer to people who have never been inside a church. It also includes those who have a church background but no personal relationship to Jesus Christ, as well as those who have not been in church for awhile, especially up to 6 months. Focusing on the fact that we are living in a time of rapid change, by attempting to be what some have termed “seeker sensitive,” it was hoped that those interviewed would open up and discuss their true feelings about church and religion, especially Christianity.

Setting

Woodbury, Minnesota is in Washington County, and is one of the fastest growing cities in Minnesota. It is located in US Congressional District 6, MN Legislative District 56B and 57A, and is part South Washington County School District 833 all located on the east side of the Twin Cities Metropolitan area. Just minutes away from downtown St. Paul to the west and a few miles from the Wisconsin boarder to the east, it is bordered by three adjacent freeways - I-94, I-494 and I-694, which provide quick access to the urban and rural areas.

In 1980 census figures reported the city as having 10,297 residents. Recent data proposes the city is currently at a population of approximately 38,000. Projections estimate the city will reach an inhabitation of 62,924 by the year 2010 and 68,000 by the year 2020. It currently ranks as the No. 1 area in the metropolitan area for new home construction.

A prime area of attraction for residential sites, Woodbury has 8 small lakes in the city. Woodbury is a beautiful community with 36 park sites totaling over 1200 acres and 51 miles of trails. The Bielenberg Sports Center opened in 1996 which contains a year round ice arena and 44,000 sq. ft. fieldhouse with artificial turf. Golf courses include: Prestwick, Woodbury Par 3 and the soon to be completed Eagle Nest. With the passage of a June 2, 1998 referendum, Woodbury plans to acquire around 500 acres of land for open space preservation and future ball fields. All of the sites are wooded or have wetlands or agriculture.

Home of major employers such as Fortis Benefits Insurance, 3M satellite offices, EcoWater Systems and most recently State Farm Insurance Headquarters, Woodbury has a solid employment economy. Two major retail centers are also located within city limits: Woodbury Village and Tamarak Village.

In 1995, the number of jobs in Woodbury were 8,495. That figure is expected to nearly double by the year 2020 to 15,900 jobs.

There are currently approximately 18 Protestant churches registered in Woodbury. An announcement for a new Catholic Church and parochial school came in recent months with development already under way.

Future plans for Woodbury include a 105,000 square foot medical office building scheduled to open in 1998 and an estimated \$47.5 million, 70 bed hospital which has a completion target date of 2000. The two facilities are expected to bring 400-600 new jobs to the area. New office space developments as well as a hotel/conference center facility are also being planned. The new Woodbury Public Library is also scheduled to be complete by the year 2000.

History and Background

Woodbury was originally named Red Rock, after a sacred stone supposedly painted by the famous Dakota Chief Little Crow. The town was renamed in 1859 when the state legislature discovered another Red Rock Township in Minnesota. Woodbury is named after Judge Levi Woodbury, a friend of the first town board chairman

Scope of the Project

This project was begun with the presupposition that there is a need for new churches in growing communities, especially churches whose focus is to reach those people who are not currently attending a church. This is due to the idea that people in these areas are in a time of great transition in their lives which makes them more receptive to the gospel. It is also based on Proverbs 20:18 that says, "Get good advice and you will succeed." By visiting with the people of the community it was hoped that adequate data would be obtained to launch a successful effort in planting a new church in the area. By discovering what types of people live in the area, it would better equip the

person considering starting a church in Woodbury to know what kind of people live there, their like and dislikes, needs and fears.

Importance

This research was imperative in determining if there was in fact a need for new churches in the City of Woodbury and if that was found to be true, then what type of church would people be willing to attend. It was hoped that through the use of the instrument, data could be gathered and relationships could be developed with the respondents. A desired effect and possible outcome of these developments, it was hoped, could lead to people expressing a desire to attend a church that would be sensitive to their needs and fears, should such a church be established in the city of Woodbury.

Chapter Two - Literature Review

Attempting to determine what “unchurched” people in the city of Woodbury would look for in a church if they were interested in attending one, was the basis for this research. What is meant by the word unchurched has been described in Chapter 1, but is reiterated here for clarification. The unchurched related to this study included not just those who have never been inside a church, but others who have a church background, and have not been a member of a church for months, even years.

The Princeton Research Center (1978) released a publication, *The Unchurched in America*, that defined an “unchurched” person as “a person who is not a member of a church or synagogue or who has not attended church or synagogue in the last six months, apart from weddings, funerals, or special holidays such as Christmas, Easter, or Yom Kippur.”

Mark Twain once said, “I knew a man who grabbed a cat by the tail and learned forty percent more about cats than the man who didn’t.” This research paper was an attempt to “grab the cat by the tail,” so to speak. My desire was to learn as much as possible about the views of the unchurched, even if some of the opinions were offered with unabashed candor. Proverbs 20:18 says, “every purpose is established by wise counsel: and with good advice make war” (KJV). The (TEV) renders this, “get good advice and you will succeed.” My hope was to learn as much as possible in order to avoid some of the common mistakes that could be made as a result of not being adequately prepared in the an attempt to plant a church.

As has already been stated, Woodbury is one of the fastest growing communities in Minnesota. It is not difficult to ascertain, nevertheless, important to consider, that

when new communities are being started at a fast pace there will be a need for new churches. It is important to recognize spiritual receptivity in a community. The Parable of the Sower and the Soils found in Matthew 13:3-23 stresses the importance of good soil. If we are going to be effective, we need to make sure we plant the seed in good soil. We need to be sensitive as to where that is. There are certain “pockets” of receptivity that we have with people. Because people are going through so much change in new communities, it is a good opportunity for the church to offer them something of stability. Many have changed jobs, the places they live, neighbors, friends, schools and the list goes on. During these times people can be very reflective and open to new things.

It is to this kind of a community that this research project was directed. “God uses both change and pain to get people’s attention and make them receptive to the gospel.” Warren cites Alvin Toffler who says that “people look for “islands of stability” when change becomes overwhelming” (Warren, 1995, p. 182). Warren says this is the reason why churches grow faster in new communities than older ones. It is because people are in the midst of great transition.

Beginning this project, it was helpful to understand a few basic facts concerning people in general. According to Dennis Finnan (1998), host and speaker on the program, *The World, the Word & You*, today four out of five Americans call themselves Christians, but less than half of them attend church services in any given week. The Barna Research group supports these figures saying 82% of Americans call themselves Christians, but less than half attend church. Barna (1993) also reported that only one out of every 10 adults will read any portion of the Bible outside the church during the week.

Due to the inability to discover any definitive research of the type needed for this project on the Woodbury Community, much of the authoritative data is indirect and came from the study of several churches that have been at the vanguard of the church-growth movement. They include: The Crystal Cathedral in Garden Grove, CA, Saddleback Community Church in Orange County, CA and Willow Creek Community Church in South Barrington, IL. Their pastors, Robert Schuller, Rick Warren and Bill Hybels respectively were great sources for direction. Another authority that was greatly consulted was the Barna Research Institute, led by George Barna, who was described as the “church’s guru of growth” in a *Christianity Today* (1992) article by Steve Rabey.

Robert Schuller (1974) is considered by himself and many others to be the pioneer of the church growth movement. He tells that when his denomination sent him into the Garden Grove community they did not do it in the same way they had done so traditionally. He said normally the denomination would wait until it had a certain number of people in a community and then they would send a pastor in. Not so with him. He was to plant a church from scratch. He knew if he was going to reach the people living there he would need to find out more about them. From his experience, he now teaches new church planters that a pastor needs to develop an “inventory” of his community by door-to door canvassing.

“No missionary to a foreign land would try to evangelize and minister to people without first understanding their culture... We don’t have to agree with our culture, but we must understand it.” (Warren, 1995, p. 165). Warren feels like the best way to find out about the culture you are working in is to talk to the people who live there. He

advocates taking your own survey and learning about their greatest needs. He says there is no substitute for “one-on-one interaction.”

Bill Hybels was inspired by Robert Schuller who was a mentor of his. Schuller wrote the book *Your Church Has Unlimited Possibilities*. In the book Schuller told how in planting a church in Orange County, CA., he had prayed for guidance and felt led to reach out to the unchurched portion of the community. The way Schuller did this was to ring doorbells on 3500 homes and take a community survey. He would begin with, “Are you an active member of a local Church?” If the people said “No,” Schuller said, “Good, I’m glad to meet you.” Then he asked them, “Why don’t you go to church?” After he had listened to their answers, he asked, “What can I do for you?” “How can I help you?” “I’m here to start a new church.” “What would make you want to come to church?” Schuller said he “listened to their answers” so he would know how “to throw the kind of bait out that they would like” (Pritchard, 1996, p. 50).

In 1975 Hybels took his own survey and asked some of the same questions Schuller had asked, according to Pritchard (1996). When people were asked why they did not go to church, some of the answers they gave him were: “The church is always asking for money.” “I am unable to relate to the music.” “I am unable to relate to the message.” “The church does not meet my needs.” “The services are predictable and boring.” “The church makes me feel guilty.”

Rick Warren was also inspired by Schuller and others. He wanted to understand the mind set of the unchurched before actually starting a church. Warren felt like Schuller’s questions needed to be rephrased for the 1980’s so he wrote his own list of five questions: “What do you think is the greatest need in this area?” “Are you actively

attending any church?” “Why do you think most people don’t attend church?” “If you were to look for a church to attend, what kind of things would you look for?” “What could I do for you?” “What advice can you give to a minister who really wants to be helpful to people?” (Warren, 1995, pp. 190-191).

He echoes Robert Schuller of Crystal Cathedral fame, in saying that pastors should know the most about the community they hope to make an impact in. Warren did this by going door-to-door for twelve weeks and just talking to people in the Saddleback Valley where he would be planting his church. He did this to find out what people’s most pressing needs were. He believes the best way to reach unbelievers is to let them know you understand the problems they are facing.

Lyle Schaller (1998) borrows advice given in the pioneering book on marketing by Theodore Levit called *Innovations in Marketing*. In this timeless classic Levit said to “Know your customer!” Schaller is one of America’s leading church consultants has commented, “The old approach to marketing was to focus on the needs of the seller. The new approach focuses on the needs of the customer” (Schaller, 1998, p. 31).

Pritchard (1996) says Hybels employs the marketing strategies of Philip Kotler to reach the unchurched. Kotler is professor at Northwestern University and is one of the leading authorities on marketing. The basic operating principles of Kotler can be summed up in the famous marketing proverb, “The consumer is king.”

With stark condemnation directed toward the evangelical church, Barna has said, “My contention, based on careful study of the data and activities of American churches, is that the major problem plaguing the Church is its failure to embrace a marketing orientation in what has become a marketing-driven environment” (Barna, 1988, p. 23).

One of the marketing ideas used by Willow Creek according to Pritchard (1996), is that of targeting their audience. Hybels has said in various interviews that his target is “cosmopolitan businessmen.” He explained his selection by saying, a pastor often has a passion for a particular group of people. Warren says for a church to be effective it must first decide on a target. He says to discover what types of people live in your area, decide which of those groups your church is best equipped to reach, then discover which styles of evangelism best match your target. It is important for churches to target their evangelistic efforts, especially small churches who must make the most of limited resources. They need to focus on reaching the people they can best communicate with. (Warren 1995)

A Peanuts cartoon shows Charlie Brown practicing archery in his backyard. Instead of aiming at a target, he would shoot an arrow at his fence and then walk over and draw a target around wherever the arrow stuck. Lucy walked up and said, “Why are you doing this, Charlie Brown?” He replied without embarrassment, “This way I never miss.” Some say this is the evangelistic strategy of many churches.

Jesus targeted his ministry, according to Mark 2:17. Warren (1995) says the reason was to be effective, not necessarily exclusive. Paul had a targeted ministry to the Gentiles. Peter targeted his ministry to the Jews. Each of the gospels were written with certain targets. Matthew for Hebrew readers, Mark for the Gentile readers.

Barna (1991) says that the bad news in America is that many churches are either stagnant or declining in size. He says there is good news though. Some churches are willing to do what it takes to be relevant to the target audience they are aiming at. The way they are doing this is to find out what does and does not work in reaching people

with the gospel today. He calls these churches “user friendly.” He describes a user friendly church as one that is in touch with the needs of those it wants to serve (Barna 1991). He says these churches are by no means willing to compromise the gospel just to make friends with the age. What they are doing that is different is listening to the people they hope to reach, and attempting to meet their felt needs as the gospel would lead them to.

Someone once remarked that if you wanted to find the right answers, you’ve got to ask the right questions. Someone else once quipped that if you asked a stupid question, you’d get a stupid answer. The key to this and any research project was in asking the right questions. “Research is a critical step for marketing the church. Often we attempt to minister to needs that do not exist while ignorantly ignoring needs that scream for attention” (Barna, 1988, p. 54-55).

It is interesting when we study the Bible that Jesus taught some of these very principles. Becoming “fishers of men” was a phrase he coined. In fact, throughout his entire ministry he went about meeting people’s needs and ministering to them in practical ways. These two things seem to be what church growth experts focus on when giving advice to others intent on reaching their communities with the gospel.

Pastor Warren says “a church will never grow beyond its capacity to meet needs” (Warren, 1995, p. 221). He talks about a church that surveyed their community and found out that the number one felt need among those that they surveyed was potty training for preschoolers. The area was filled with young couples who genuinely needed help. Instead of just ignoring this they went to work putting together a training seminar for those parents. As a result, dozens of couples were reached with the gospel. The

pastor of that church would often joke that their church took literally Proverbs 22:6, “Train up a child in the way he should *go!*”

Sermons that expound the Scripture without a “clear relationship to people’s felt needs will fall on deaf ears” (Barna, 1990, p. 126). He says people who attend church want to know how to apply their faith to their lives. There is an old adage that is as true today as it ever was: “People don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care.”

There has been some criticism of the felt needs approach to evangelism in the last couple of years. Some talk in pastoral circles express concern about the dangers of “pandering to people’s felt needs” (Barna, 1991, p. 107). These critics fear that if we pay too much attention to what people “feel” they need, we will begin to focus on something other than the true gospel and the message will be compromised. Healthy and growing churches that he has studied proved this does not have to be the case. These churches were more concerned about effective ministry than about some slick marketing gimmick. Some of the leaders had learned that it was a much slower process to create spiritual growth among new members without the felt needs approach. If these leaders could find out what people were thinking about, then show them how the truth of Scripture applies to those things, they would have an audience ready and willing to listen to the message.

Warren (1995) says that the churches must be seeker sensitive, but it must not be seeker driven. We must adapt our communication style to our culture without adopting its sinful qualities and giving in to it.

In his evaluation of Willow Creek, Pritchard asks the questions, “Should we seek to understand our unchurched friends and family? Yes. Should we do a market analysis

of the unchurched Harry? I don't believe so. The topic of marketing is one of the most controversial elements of Willow Creek seeker service" (Pritchard, 1998, p. 193).

It is important to try to understand why people are unchurched and what keeps them from wanting to come and worship with the Body of Christ, according to Amy Conn (1998). She says that it is important to be focused on the individual if we are to minister to the needs of unchurched.

The Barna Research Institute reported that 93% of all households own one or more Bible(s). Their research group also found that when "unchurched" people were asked the question, "Is the church today relevant?", 38% percent said "yes," while 62% said "no." "Indeed, only a small proportion of adults say they would turn to the church for help in a time of personal crisis" (Barna, 1990, p. 138). Americans have a reduced respect for tradition. The only way a tradition is esteemed worthy today is if it can be proved to be applicable and better than other options.

According to Josh Hunt (1997), the web master for his own homepage on church growth strategy, one of the reasons many people have lost interest in religion is because they have not experienced God on a regular basis in church. He says many find sermons boring and intangible to real life experiences.

If we are going to attract people to the Church, we will need to be more sensitive to their felt needs. "The competition of the local church is not other churches down the street. It is the television, sleeping in on Sunday, the weekend special at Bloomingdale's, games and picnics in the park and so forth." Barna continues by saying, "As people's lives become more and more tense, their time more and more valuable, and their

skepticism about the influence and benefits of the church more confirmed, attracting people will be more difficult” (Barna, 1990, p. 146).

“The best way to get the unchurched or nonbelievers to consider the Church valid and worthwhile will be by making ourselves relevant to their lives. How do we do that? By understanding their most pressing felt needs and responding directly to those needs” (Strobel, 1993, p. 66).

Pritchard (1996) gives the subject of defining the word “relevance” a thorough going over in his book. He says he heard the word relevance over and over during his time of research at Willow Creek. He posits the questions: “What is relevance?” “What does it mean to speak in a relevant way to seekers?”

A marketing theory that has been strongly developed by Kotler (1988) is to “spotlight the needs of individuals” so they can be marketed. Kotler explains that “from a marketing standpoint, to comprehend someone’s needs you must first understand their culture” (Kotler, 1988, p. 17).

According to Edward G. Dobson (Dobson 1998) the traditional way of trying to reach the “unchurched” is not very effective anymore. “When we try to reach unchurched people in North America, we are operating like foreign missionaries who must learn the language and adjust to the thought patterns of the people to whom they want to communicate.”

It is possible to be contemporary without compromising. Warren (1995) says that often churches end up going to one of the two extremes to avoid each other. They either focus on becoming contemporary at the expense of the gospel or they become so afraid of

compromise that they fail to be able to relate to today's culture by becoming so far removed.

Jesus never lowered his standards, but he always started where people were. He was contemporary without compromising the truth. Paul was the same way. One prime example is found in Acts 17. At Mars Hill he started out by just hanging out with the people. He sat and talked with them and learned about them. He showed respect for their culture and eventually they invited him into their circle and gave him the opportunity to speak to them about the gospel. Paul never compromised his message, but he did adapt to his culture.

The Gospel is always presented in the context of some culture, the question is, which one? Warren (1995) believes no church will be completely neutral. He goes on to talk about how Saddleback has adopted the casual dress of the southern California climate. He says if you see men wearing a suit to church they are probably out of town visitors. He says that to many unchurched Americans, the word informal is a synonym for authentic, while formality suggests insincere and phony. A recent survey that was taken by GQ magazine found that only about 25 percent of American men now own a suit.

The Christian community needs to be cognizant of the rapid pace of change that is occurring in America. In the last two decades, the opposite has taken place. The church has not been sensitive to those changes and has operated as though our culture and environment has stayed the same. From the advice given by the experts consulted, organizations that maintain a significant influence will be those that adapt to a changing environment without losing their essence. Others who resist change, and choose not to

try to understand the changes taking place, while at the same time constantly transforming themselves within the new culture, will end up losing their influence and will become defunct. It seems that churches often fail to objectively evaluate their ministry efforts and to react intelligently to a changing culture.

“The problem with many churches today is that they are still trying to use bait and hooks from the 1950s in the 1990s--and the fish are not longer biting. The greatest enemy to our success in the future is often the success of our past” (Warren, 1995, p. 200). Barna (1990) concurs by expressing that churches that are not willing to change, but continue to go forward operating in the mode of “business as usual” will not be able to gain the attention of the average American adult.

It is important that we are sensitive to the changes that have occurred in the past few decades. People today expect to be offered a variety of options. “Unfortunately, when it comes to worship services most churches offer only two options: Take it or leave it! If you can’t attend at 11:00 A.M., you’re out of luck” (Warren, 1995, p. 200).

Barna asserts that “the only constant is the slow drip of constant change” (Barna, 1990, p. 23). He says before the turn of the century we will see countless changes in the areas of: value, currency, beliefs, background or culture, tools and institutions. Old approaches and traditional strategies for sharing our faith will no longer work in the 90’s. Warren (1995) cautions that we must not confuse the methods with the message. The message must never change, but the methods must change. There is an old cliché that says; Methods are many, principles are few, methods change often, principles never do.

It is going to become more difficult to convince people that the faith we espouse is pertinent to the next century if the tools of our trade are from the previous century,

according to Barna (1990). Today, change is representative of opportunity. It is the best way to apprehend new possibilities. If a person is not willing to accept change, they are seen as outdated, resistant to growth, “shortsighted and foolish.”

Robert Schuller was on the forefront of the use of technology for religious communication... utilizing the latest and best in technology. Barna says “owning equipment such as personal computers, laser printers and fax machines...will send a signal to the community that the church is relevant and informed about what is really going on in society” (Barna, 1990, p. 60).

Barna’s (1990) advice for church leaders to technologically literate is extremely relevant. He says this sends a positive message to the surrounding community. He believes that churches will need to be dedicated to excellence in all that they do, which does not necessarily mean that they have to do a lot. Doing a few things with excellence may put a church in a better light, than trying to do many things with mediocrity.

There is a lot of talk today about quality versus quantity. Parents are told that if they will just spend quality time with their children then quantity time is not important. I do not believe this to be true. Both quality and quantity are important. In some Christian circles there is the idea that churches must choose either quality or quantity. Warren (1995) says a church can have both. Many pastors wish to ignore this, but it remains true. Quality produces quantity. A church full of genuinely changed people attracts others.

Barna (1990) is very astute when he says that in the past few years our country has been enamored with a quest for the best. We are shifting from an emphasis on quantity to an emphasis on quality. Having failed to achieve satisfaction through

possessing more, we will seek it through possessing the best. This is not a sign of maturity for America.

Warren (1995) says that most churches today try to do too many things. They don't really focus on what is important. All kinds of programs just keep getting added without getting rid of the programs that don't work. Consequently, churches end up wearing the people out trying to do too much.

When the unchurched are listened to, they do have some valid complaints that must be addressed. According to Meeks (1995) questions asked of the church need to be, "Where are you willing to begin with people, and how patient will you be with them during the preconversion phase?" "Will they be loved unconditionally for who they are?" He says reaching them is more about establishing relationships, than about getting them to attend Sunday morning worship.

Barna's research found on average, no people group in the community has a majority who would claim that local churches in the area are very sensitive to the needs of their group. This covers segments such as families, minorities, women, senior adults and the unchurched. Only 9 percent of the unchurched claim that local churches are very sensitive to their needs. How discouraging, too, to find that less than half of all families in the community perceive the church to be very sensitive to their particular needs.

One of the trademarks of a successful church, according to Barna, was that they allowed visitors to be anonymous in the service. He said that in many stagnant churches, "anonymity is next to ungodliness" (Barna, 1991, p. 177). He said in stagnant churches there is an underlying assumption "that friendliness and Christian love can only be shown

by showering attention on the visitor.” User friendly churches knew how to make people feel welcomed without making them feel cornered.

An article in Christianity Today (1990) titled “Forget the Name Tags” said that the unchurched generally want the best of both worlds--people showing an interest in them, while for the most part they allow them to remain anonymous. The “unchurched” like to be noticed, but do not want to be the objects of undue attention.

In the future, church attendance will continue to decrease by about 35 percent, according to Barna (1991). He says if it were not for the growing body of congregations who are willing to change the traditional approach to service times and offer worship services on Saturdays, and on Sunday afternoons, in addition to (or occasionally, instead of) the traditional Sunday morning time, the figures would be even more drastic.

A Gallop poll a few years ago stated that, according to the unchurched, the church is the most boring place to be. Rick Warren found four basic complaints from his survey:

- 1) Church is boring, especially the sermons. The messages don't relate to my life.
- 2) Church members are unfriendly to visitors.
- 3) The church is more interested in my money than in me.
- 4) We worry about the quality of the church's child care (Warren, 1995, pp. 192-192).

The successful church must be able to prove its effectiveness. Barna notes: “Adults these days are too busy and under too much pressure to cheerfully and willingly offer their free time to activities that continually fail” (Barna 1991, p. 34). In trying to lead people into involvement with the church, we need to be very sensitive to the value of people's time we are asking them to surrender. No ministry will gain the support of adults if it does not acknowledge the importance of people's time. One of the most significant changes we have seen and will continue to see in the coming years, according

to Barna (1990), is a change in what we value most. Barna says the new currency that we value most will our time, because it is the one resource we cannot manufacture. He says that in our society there is no scarcity of money, but most people feel frustration from not having enough time to do all the things they would like to do. Barna says more and more people will pay money to protect their time. In his words: "... money will be used to guard the more valuable commodity, time" (Barna, 1990, p. 39).

The Princeton Religious Research Center (1993) announced Gallop poll results that found that barely half of the adult population has a great deal of confidence in the clergy. With this in mind, it is important to consider the importance of the church leadership in determining what people expect. Barna (1991) says the growing churches he studied were led by pastors who were models of positive attitudes, full of exuberance and anticipation. He said that due to the scandals among leaders in highly visible positions in the last couple of years, people are less willing to trust today.

According to Warren (1995) another important consideration in deciding what kind of people to target is to assess the cultural background of the church's leadership. "Many studies have shown that the number one reason people choose a church is because they identify with the pastor." Warren says, "Don't misunderstand this: The pastor does not attract first-time visitors, but he is the major reason visitors come back (or don't). When visitors identify with the pastor, they are far more likely to return."

Of the churches studied by Barna (1991), without exception, every thriving church was led by a pastor who is "extraordinary." These leaders are extremely gifted men, yet he qualifies what he means when he says "extraordinary." The things that make them this way may be different than some would think. While the leaders studied were

very diverse, “without exception, each of these men lives from day to day for one single purpose: to bring glory and honor to God through whatever service they are capable of performing” (Barna, 1990, p. 190). Barna says while the leader is important, church growth is more than the sum of his leadership. It is willing people who have caught the vision.

A difference in attitude is what studies found to be the key identifying difference in growing churches. These kinds of churches exuded a positive attitude that was relative to a vision for ministry. The people in these churches were actually excited about the ministry.

“Vision and passion are two central elements in attracting new people to the church and to faith in Christ” (Barna 1990). Proverbs 29:18 (KJV) “Where there is no vision the people perish.” Warren says he believes it is also true that where there is no vision, people “leave for another parish!” Warren says, “People want to join a church that knows where it is going. When a church clearly communicates its destination, people are eager to get on board” (Warren, 1995, p. 87).

Warren (1995) says people want to be a part of a purpose driven church. He says if you want people to get excited about church and to financially support it in a generous way, you have to explain to them where the church is headed. He says you should not expect people to want to join your church without knowing its destination.

J. Oswald Sanders once wrote, "The church has always prospered most when it has been blessed with strong, spiritual leaders who expected and experienced the touch of the supernatural in their service" (Sanders, 1980, p. 25). Field Marshall Bernard L. Montgomery said, ““Leadership is the capacity and will to rally men and women to a

common purpose, and the character which inspires confidence" (Montgomery, 1958, p. 70).

My endeavor in presenting this research has been an attempt to not only assess what others have said, but to consider what I must do. A few years ago I read about Dr. John Geddie, who went to Aneityum in 1848 and worked there for God twenty-four years. On the tablet erected to his memory these words are inscribed:

When he landed, in 1848,
there were no Christians.

When left, in 1872,
there were no heathen.

The community he sought to reach was very different from Woodbury and others I am sure, but with God's commission and our commitment, anything is possible.

Chapter Three - Data Collection Plan

Subjects

Fifteen out of thirty-five residents who were approached with the Woodbury Community Opinion Survey, met the qualifications for a respondent. Significant findings for those who were approached, but did not meet the minimum qualifications have been included in Chapter 5 of this research paper. Each respondent was selected from various residential areas of the City of Woodbury's population.

The minimum requirement for participants was a "No" response to the qualifying question: "Are you currently attending or have you attended a church in the past 6 months other than a wedding or funeral or at Christmas or Easter?" Those who qualified were confirmed to be residents of Woodbury, MN. Respondents included in the survey included 6 males and 9 females.

Materials

A one page, single-sided questioner containing 16 questions was the instrument used to assess the population. The rationale used for selecting this was to talk one-on-one with the people in the survey area. The instrument included a variety of other questions designed with optional responses that would best describe how one would respond, as well as open ended opinion questions. The questions were designed after doing extensive research on similar studies that have been done in other communities.

Procedure

Respondents were approached in this manner: “Hi, my name is Drew Baldrige. I’m taking an opinion poll of our community for my college research paper. I’m not here to sell you anything or sign you up for anything. I’d just like to ask you a few questions. There are no right or wrong answers, and it will only take about 1-3 minutes of your time.” (See Appendix B).

As stated previously, the first question respondents were asked is if they were currently a member of a church, according to the definition of an “unchurched” person as described in chapters 1 and 2 of this project. A “yes” answer disqualified them from the survey since the survey was designed to assess the opinions of the unchurched population. Those who did not qualify were thanked for their time and the surveyor moved on to the next house. Those who completed the survey were told participation in the survey was on a volunteer basis.

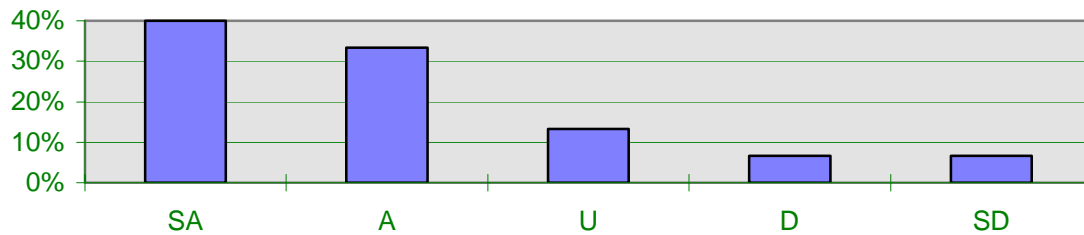
Design

The type of instrument used for this study did not lend itself to a descriptive analysis of the data. There was no relationship testing used in the final compilation of materials, even though data was collected that could be used for further study in this area. An evaluation of the data used is discussed in chapter 4 of this project.

Chapter 4 - Results and Discussion

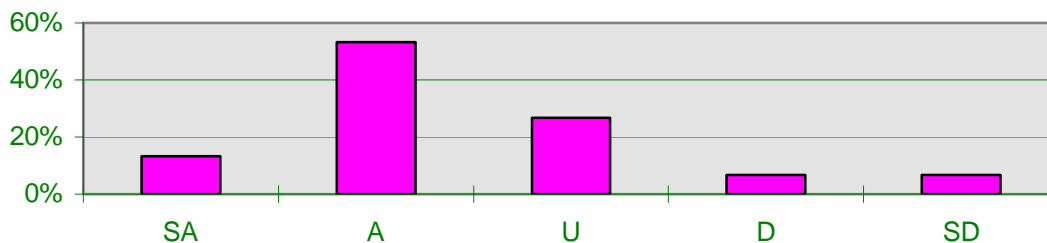
The results of The Woodbury Community Opinion Survey (Appendix A) are detailed on the following pages. The information contained in these charts and the subsequent discussion where considered pertinent data for this project.

The Holy Bible is inspired by God



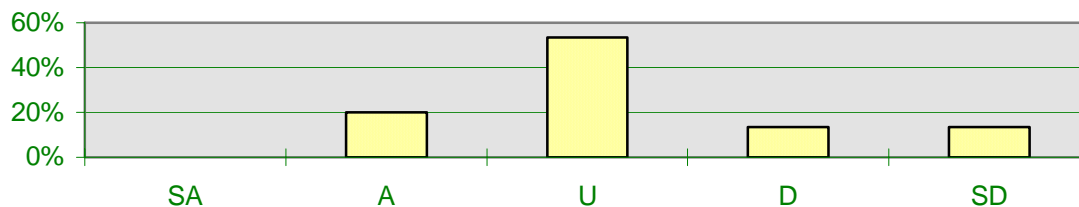
Several of the people I talked with commented that they believe it is important to read the Bible and pray, but did not feel they needed the Church in order to live a Christian life.

The Church plays an important role in today's society



The survey revealed a very perplexing problem in attempting to get people to come to church. No one strongly agreed that sermons are relevant and speak to today's needs.

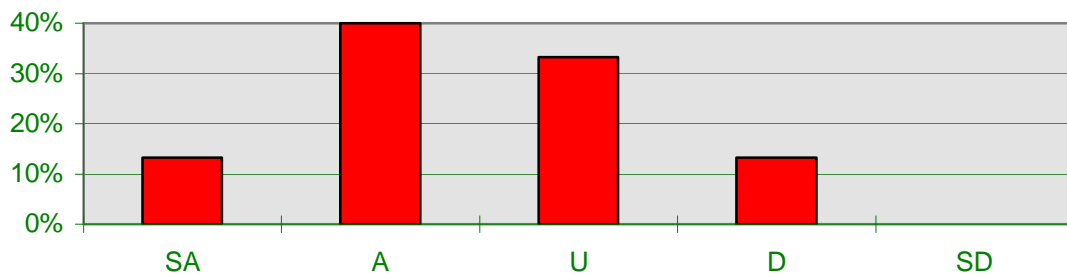
Church is exciting with sermons that speak to today's needs



Someone once commented that it is a sin to bore people with the gospel. If these statistics truly indicate our society's feeling as a whole, the Christian Church is in need of some serious repenting.

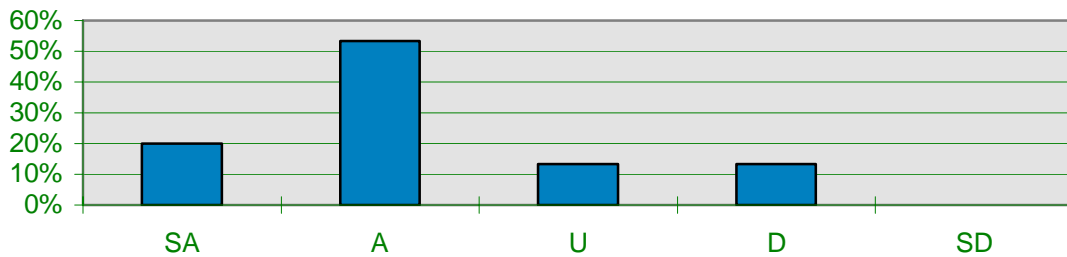
Most people felt that church members were friendly, despite some who were undecided or disagreed. This reveals that churches have some work to do in ministering in a way that will allow people the chance to see the "Christ" of Christianity.

Church members are friendly and accepting



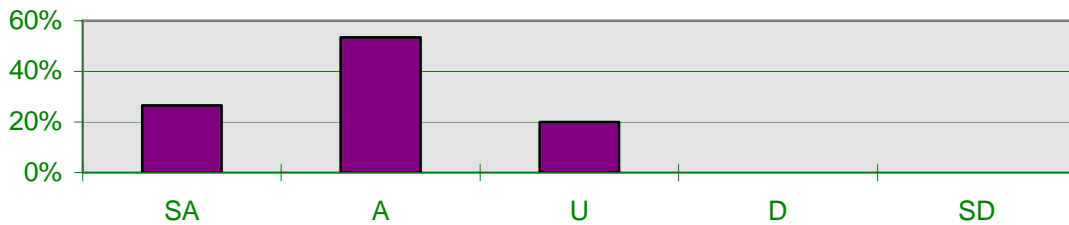
It was somewhat surprising that more people did not see the Church as just being interested in their money. From some of the empirical research I found, I thought this would be an area that would lean in the other direction.

Churches are interested in people more than just for their money



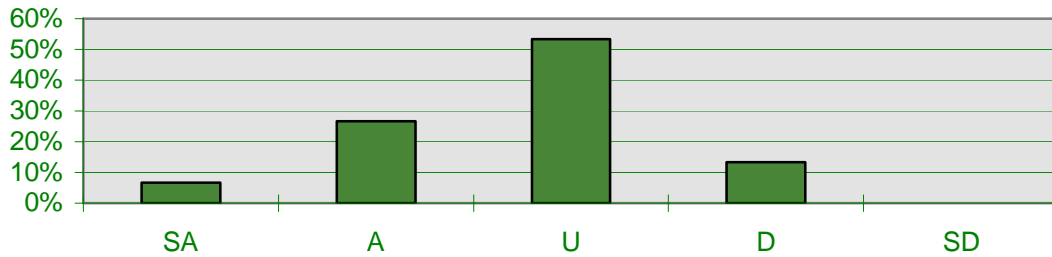
The study proved to me something that I felt was true, but wanted to see how other people viewed it. The leader of an organization is very important as to whether or not people will support it or not. This places a great responsibility on the pastoral staff of churches, however, that is their calling.

Who the pastor is strongly influences a person's decision about attending a particular church



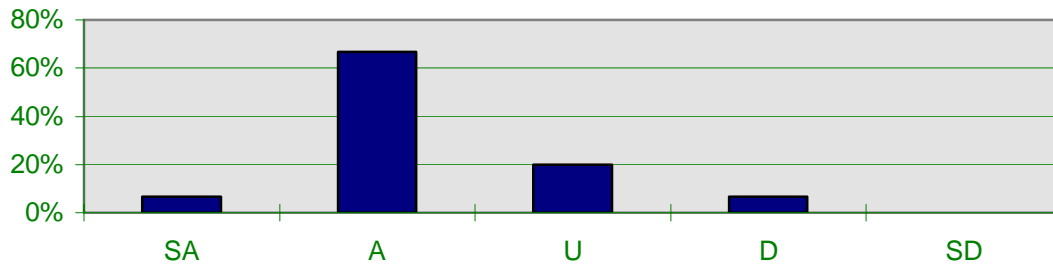
When asked about music in the church many gave an undecided response, mostly due to the fact that they had not been in a church for awhile and truly did not know.

Churches today have music that is appealing and up to date



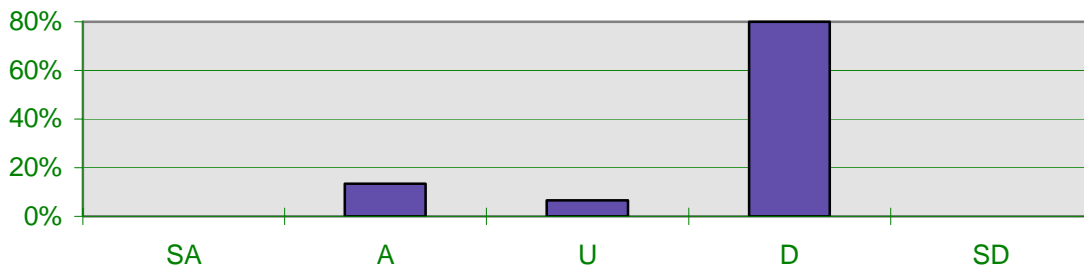
I believe most people I talked with may have misunderstood my question concerning time to mean, "Do you think leaders understand you are busy and that is why you don't go to church?" For this reason, I would change this question to something that had to do with the length of a church service or church involvement.

Church leaders understand the importance of people's time



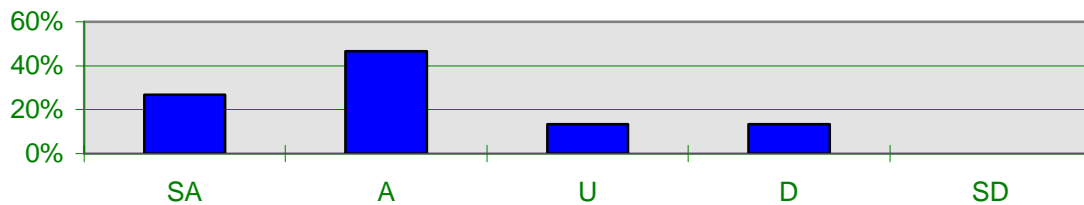
No other question received a greater majority or a more adamant response than the one on dress. A resounding percentage would much rather wear casual clothes that are comfortable than what is traditionally thought of as church attire.

People attending church prefer formal dress over casual



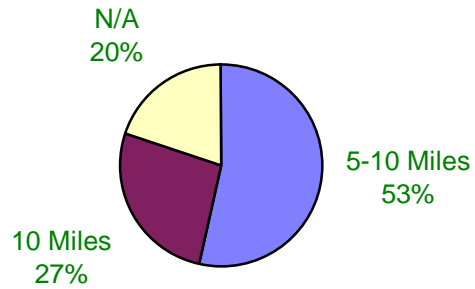
Denominational lines seemed to still run deep among those I interviewed. I personally believe if people find a church that can offer them something they can't find anywhere else, denomination would have a lesser place.

The denomination of a church would be important in a person's decision whether or not to attend



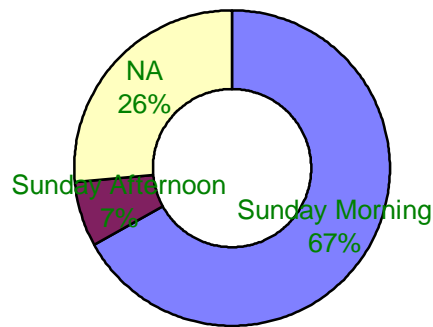
The majority of people want to attend a church that is close to home, but are willing to drive a few extra miles if that church meets their needs.

How many miles would you be willing to drive to attend a church that meets your expectations?



The majority still prefers the traditional time slot over new contemporary ones. Many people did express their desire for churches to offer more flexible service times so they would have different options.

If you were to attend a church on a weekend, what would be the best time for you to attend?



For the most part, people interviewed were friendly and very willing to participate. They were candid in their opinions and offered valuable insight for a church that is truly interested in reaching out to them. Most appreciated the fact that someone would even want to find out what they were thinking.

People expressed their desire to see the church get more involved in the community. Some were concerned about the youth and said they wished the church would do more to help in this area.

Most explained that the reason why they felt people did not attend church today is because of our fast paced lifestyles. Some said people were just “plain ol’ lazy.” Others noted the bad publicity the Church has received in recent years with scandals in the national media. More than a few said it was because church is boring and irrelevant.

Some of the respondents said if they could find a church that got to the point, had a good music program, was less formal and had a good pastor, they would be more willing to attend.

Chapter 5 - Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

The purpose of this project was to discover what the views and opinions were of residents of Woodbury, MN who were not currently attending a church. The desired result was to find out why they do not attend and through using what they had to say, give careful consideration to what might be done to reach them with the gospel.

It was found that much of the actual statistics taken from conducting a study of the Woodbury community matched studies that have been done in other communities, as stated in chapter 2 of this project. Not all facts were congruent with other studies, however, and Woodbury must be considered as a unique community, as is every community.

One statistic that has not been noted anywhere else in this project concerns the relationship between the number of people approached for the survey who were unable to be qualified, as opposed to those who were. As mentioned in chapter 1, only 15 out of the 35 people approached qualified as an unchurched individual. In a positive light, one could feel good in knowing that at least 57% of all people living in Woodbury attend church on at least somewhat of a regular basis. The sad news, if this sample does in fact relate to the population of Woodbury as a whole, is that there is a tremendous need for new and/or more effective churches in this growing community.

Recommendations

It is suggested that the person seriously intent on truly reaching the unchurched population of Woodbury, continue to take opinion polls that would lead to a true random

sample. More dependent and independent variables should be introduced within the survey along with variables that would help target groups within the population. Some questions should be revised or redesigned based on the information given in chapter 4.

Based on the data I have received, I am convinced that there is a need for new churches in Woodbury. As a home missions pastor beginning to plant a church in this community, I can learn from this research how to better reach the people our church will be targeting.

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