Get Out There!
Ideas For Learning Your Community
By Glenn A. Lucas

I am often amazed by the assumptions leaders make about who the people are in their community. My experience is that they haven’t really researched the community and so they base their sense of who is there on what they observe when traveling to and from the church on Sunday or during the week for a meeting. The problem with basing one’s understanding of the community on this anecdotal evidence is that most people travel the same route to and from the church so who they see may represent only a small portion of the community. What one sees on the main street where the church is located may be very different from what is just a few blocks off the main street. Churches with effective outreach ministries know this and take the time to study their communities and find ways to be a part of them. The following are some ways to learn more about your community.

Get A Demographic Study
There are many entities that will provide you with a demographic study of your community. Demographics will tell you what has been and projects anticipated trends of people in the community including race, age, gender, marital status, income, household size and much more.

Go For Drive
Get leaders in their cars and have them drive around the neighborhood and take note of who and what they see. Do this at different times of the day and through out the week. Are there patterns of people coming and going? Who’s on the street and at what times. What do the homes look like? What are people driving? Also, ask what don’t we see that we would have expected to see?

Take A Walk
Get out of the car and walk around the neighborhood. Talk to people you meet along the way. Identify yourself and your church. Ask them what they think are the greatest assets of the community. Ask them what the biggest challenges are the community faces. Ask them what they think the role of a church should be in the community. Listen to the sounds of the community. Smell the smells and see the condition of streets, sidewalks, businesses and homes. What do all of these teach you about who’s there and what needs they may have.

Visit Businesses
Walk into businesses and restaurants. Identify yourself and strike up conversations with the owners. Ask them the same kind of questions as you ask residents. Is there a potential to partner with the business in meeting needs in the community?

Meet With The City Planner
The City Planner knows what future development is slated for the community where your church is located. Are new businesses moving in? Which ones? Will there be new residential housing? Targeting what economic level? Is the city planning to build new schools? Where and how large?

Talk To City Officials
No matter how small or large a city may be there is usually local representation that are available and willing to talk about the city and/or community and their dreams and plans for it. The same questions asked of others should be asked of these officials.

Make Friends With Local Realtors
Realtors know the trends in the community housing market. Are property values rising or falling? Who’s moving out and who’s moving in? Realtors know because their livelihood depends on this knowledge.

Learn From Social Service Agencies
Social Service Agencies are on the frontlines of meeting peoples needs in communities. They know what the issues are and what resources are already present in the community as well as those that are lacking. Ask the same questions as everyone else. Is there a gap your church can fill?
**Connect With Other Churches**

Learn from other church leaders what they are doing. What has been their experience in the community? What ministries are they providing that meet community needs? Can you partner with them? Can they partner with you as you identify a gap in services?

The goal of learning the community is to create a gospel presence in it so that your church can reach those who don’t know our Savior Jesus by meeting them where they are and drawing them into a saving relationship with Jesus.

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The SED has a goal to plant at least 100 new ministries, 2.5 million faith sharing moments, 3,000 prayer partners, 100 congregations intentionally focused on outreach, and 60 mission outreach teams by the 500th anniversary of the Reformation in October 2017.

Visit the SED web site at [se.lcms.org](http://se.lcms.org) for resources to help your ministry be more effective in building God’s kingdom.

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**Questions For Reflection**

1. How many of the above have we already done?
2. Which of the above ideas could we implement quickly?
3. Who will take responsibility for learning the community in your church? How will they communicate their findings to the church?
4. What other ideas do you have for learning your community?

**Links**

Demographics:  Southeastern District  LCEF  

Demographics: Percept  
[http://www.perceptgroup.com](http://www.perceptgroup.com)

Demographics: U.S. Census Bureau  
[http://www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov)

Demographics: Wikipedia – Demographics of the United States  

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