Lesson Plan & Study Guide

Mission Group Process
Part Five: Getting Acquainted with Mission Context

Working with Jesus

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The iFollow Discipleship Series

SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH

Vervent

CENTER FOR CREATIVE MINISTRY

About the iFollow Discipleship Series
Pastor's Edition

Categories

The iFollow Discipleship Series is designed to be used in congregations to assist people in their pursuit of God. This assumes that individuals are in unique places in their journey and there is no perfect set of lessons that everyone must complete to become a disciple—in fact discipleship is an eternal journey. Therefore the iFollow curriculum is a menu of milestones that an individual, small group, or even an entire church can choose from. The lessons can be placed in three general categories: **Meeting with Jesus** (does not assume a commitment to Jesus Christ); **Walking with Jesus** (assumes an acceptance of Jesus Christ); and **Working with Jesus** (assumes a desire to serve Jesus Christ).

Components

Each lesson has a presenter's manuscript which can be read word for word, but will be stronger if the presenter puts it in his/her own words and uses personal illustrations. The graphic slides can be played directly from the Pastor's DVD or customized and played from a computer. There are also several group activities and discussion questions to choose from as well as printable student handouts.

Usage

The lessons are designed to be used in small groups, pastor's Bible classes, prayer meetings, seminars, retreats, training sessions, discussion groups, and some lessons may be appropriate sermon outlines.

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Discipleship
Series:
Working
with Jesus

Action Plan
& Presenter
Notes

**Mission
Group
Process**
Part Five:
Getting
Acquainted
with Mission
Context

1

Mission Group Process, Part Five:
Getting Acquainted with Mission Context

This is the fifth in a series of six units designed to provide the preparation and training necessary to launch a mission group.

Learning Objectives

1. Understand how the social, cultural, demographic, economic, political, physical and spiritual context of a mission interacts with the missionary activity itself
2. Learn methods for gathering information about the context of your mission
3. Learn methods of analyzing the information that you gather
4. Develop the ability to apply the information about context to the development of strategy

Content Outline

1. Bible study
2. Kinds of communities
3. Map study
4. Demographics
5. Religious profile
6. Community Survey or Needs Assessment

Background Material for the Instructor

Christ sent His disciples to particular communities and people groups. "You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." (Acts 1:8) The spectrum here ranges from the most local people group—the residents of Jerusalem, where the disciples were located—to the most distant people groups—the ends of the earth. Judea is next door to Jerusalem, both geographically and, more importantly, in terms of language and culture. Samaria is actually geographically closer to Jerusalem than some parts of Judea, but it is more distant in terms of culture.

Mission Group Process
Part Five: Getting Acquainted with Mission Context
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In Acts 2, "Jews from every nation," gathered for the feast of Pentecost, and heard the first Christian public evangelism. The Scripture takes note of their diverse cultures—"Parthians, Medes ... Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea ... Cappadocia, Pontus ... Asia, Phrygia ... Pamphylia, Egypt ... Libya ... Rome ... Crete and Arabia"—and declares that "each one heard ... in his own language." (Vss 5-12) In this instance, God evidently worked a miracle to make the translations possible, which is an indicator of how important cultural bridges are to Him. Normally, He depends on those He calls to a particular mission to care for this element, but that does not make it any less important.

Paul began to reach beyond the Jewish diaspora and bring Gentiles to Christ. This provoked deep division within the Christian movement which ultimately resulted in the first general council of church leaders as recorded in Acts 15. In verses 24-29 is recorded the decision of the council which permits cultural adaptation to the Gentile context while holding on to basic principles of following Jesus.

Paul's understanding of the social context is revealed in his strategy for church planting. This pattern is repeated in many places in the Book of Acts and in the epistles, but nowhere is it more explicitly described than in Acts 18. Paul comes to Corinth as a missionary, connects with a couple—Aquila and Priscilla—who share his Jewish religion, his occupation and his status has a newcomer. They set up a business and household together. He goes to the synagogue each Sabbath and begins to share the gospel. Eventually, Paul starts a house church in the home of Titius Justus, with some Jews and a number of God-fearing Gentiles. Evidently at this point Aquila and Priscilla are among the new Christians in this group because they are soon mentioned again, later in the chapter, accompanying Paul to Ephesus where he left them in charge of the church there. They discipled another man who went on to plant the church in yet a third community.

Once your Mission Group has begun to implement some initial projects, the next major task is to begin to study the culture and needs of the people you are attempting to minister with. This is not something that can be taken care of in one meeting or a short period of time. Getting acquainted with the people that you are trying to reach is simply the first step. The task of learning about their culture, values and needs is a task that will continue throughout the life of your mission.

What Type of Community are You In?

The first step in understanding your community is simply to identify the type of neighborhood or neighborhoods in your area. This is the key to interpreting demographics, discovering community needs and knowing the local culture. The most common neighborhood typology is related to urbanization. Even if

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you are working in a community far from the nearest city, it is identified as "exur-ban"—literally, outside the urban area. Urbanization is the most important social dynamic of the last 150 years in North America and around the globe. In 1850, less than one in twenty North Americans lived in urban communities. By 1950, four out of five were residents of urban neighborhoods. In 2007, the United Nations announced that the majority of the population around the world is now in metropolitan areas.

You can learn to "read" a metropolitan area in much the same way that one can "read" the rings on the stump of a tree. Each is centered on a seaport, river or major rail link. This provided the original reason for the historic settlement that eventually grew to become a city. Most cities in North America were originally com-mercial centers focused on trading. Shipping facilities, banks, wholesale merchants, insurance companies and other businesses associated with commerce created the "downtown" which is at the heart of each metropolitan area.

What Type of Community are You In?

Later, the cities became industrial centers, focused on production in foundries and factories which pulled many workers from the small towns and rural areas. Around the "downtown" of each metropolitan area, there is a donut-shaped area called the "inner city." Today, it is usually made up of industrial plants and decrepit housing. This was new development during the industrial revolution. More recently many of the factories have moved or closed down, and most of the workers have moved away. What is left in these neighborhoods are the poorest residents, including newly-arrived immigrants and ethnic minorities who may find it difficult to get hous-ing elsewhere due both to cost and discrimination.

From the "inner city" layer on out to the municipal limits of the central city there are a number of neighborhoods once known as "street car suburbs." Toward the end of the 19th Century, in later stages of industrial development, as labor unions increased the pay of factory workers and street cars were built, many people moved further out to build larger homes. Townhouses and, later, Victorian houses, interspersed with parks, characterize the earliest of these neighborhoods. Later neighborhoods were built during the first half of the 20th Century and reflect a variety of styles.

Beyond the city limits of the central city, there are large rings of suburban towns. Almost all of these were built since the end of World War II in 1945, but many towns have a small central business section of older buildings. This was originally a small town, some distance from the city, and dates from a much earlier time than the post-World War II suburban development. Here there are lawns, trees and "green belts." Running through these neighborhoods are "belt" highways, freeway and express-ways which circle the metropolitan area. Suburbs inside the beltway are the earlier developments, and those outside are the most recent.

Interspersed among the suburbs are office centers and industrial parks where the information industries of today and the future are based. These developments are sometimes called "edge city." This is where much of the current growth in urban population is occurring.

Beyond the metropolitan area is open country interspersed with small towns and villages. The rural regions between the metropolitan areas contain less than 20% of the population in North America, but the majority of the Adventist Church members and about two-thirds of Adventist congregations. Adventists tend to be more oriented toward "the country" than are most of the people Christ has asked them to minister to.

Each of these donut-shaped rings of urban development and the surrounding rural region include several types of communities. When you identify what type of neighborhood you are working in, you will begin to be able to understand the demographics, development and dynamics of your community. The book *Understanding Your Community* by Monte Sahlin (2006, Center for Creative Ministry) includes a map giving a detailed picture of the various kinds of neighborhoods and a description of each specific type of community. (See Chapter 3.)

Get a Good Map

In order to see where your community is located in this picture, obtain a good map of your metropolitan area or rural region. Look for a map that enables you to see both the larger context of your region and the specific neighborhood(s) where your ministry is focused. Find a map that shows the boundaries of municipalities, counties and Zip Code areas (or Postal Codes in Canada), so that you can locate demographic data on your map.

At any good book store there is usually a good display of such maps. If you contact the local Chamber of Commerce, or city or county planning department, or regional planning association, you will find that these organizations provide maps. These may be free or available at modest cost. You can also find a map to print from mapquest, yahoomaps, googlemaps, or other online sources.

Mark on the map the location of your church or ministry, and indicate the other churches and important institutions in the area, such as schools, hospitals, and community centers. To define your ministry area, draw a circle on the map based on the distance from which people are most likely to commute for attendance at your outreach events. Using the location of your building as the center point, draw a circle based on the research finding that newcomers will commute only about 15 minutes to visit an activity for the first few times. If you are located in an urban neighborhood, this circle should be three miles out from the center. If your

church is located in a suburban community, this circle should be nine miles out from the center. If your church is located in a small town or rural area, this circle should be 15 miles out from the center.

The easiest way to identify demographic data at a local level, so that it is specific to a particular community, is by using Zip Codes in the U.S. or Postal Codes in Canada. Once you have drawn the circle on your map, carefully identify those Zip Code areas that are substantially within the circle. Where the line runs through the middle of a Zip Code, this calls for some observation and judgment. For example, a Zip Code may cover a wide area, but only a small portion of it is built up with lots of streets on the map. It is likely that this is where most of the people located in the Zip Code actually live. If the built up portion is within your circle, even if it is the small portion of the to-tal Zip Code area, then it is best to include that Zip Code in your list for demographic data.

A Windshield Survey

A quick way to begin to gather information about your community is to do a "wind-shield survey." Part 3 in this set of Mission Group Process Units provides a specific instrument that you can use in this method of data collection. It works best if this is done in teams of two, one person driving and the other working as observer and taking notes. In densely-populated areas, it can be used as a walking tour instead of being done from cars.

The procedure for a "windshield survey" is to bring together four to 15 teams, perhaps on a Sabbath afternoon. Have the community mapped out prior to the meeting, and quickly assign streets. The idea is for each team to go up and down several streets which cut across the entire community or a major portion of it. If you have a large area to cover and relatively few volunteers, then use a sampling method. Have each team drive every third street or every fifth street, for example. Avoid dead-ends and short streets.

A Windshield Survey

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The observers are to take notes and not come back with broad, general reactions. There may be specific kinds of useful information that you want them to look for in addition to the items on the instrument. For example, schools where a tutoring project might be started or empty meeting space for a community Bible class. Take a few minutes to review the instrument and your additional list of items with the teams before they go out, so that they understand clearly what to look for and the kind of reports you will want.

After the teams spend an hour or two scanning the community, the most valuable

iFollow
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with Jesus

Action Plan
& Presenter
Notes

**Mission
Group
Process**
Part Five:
Getting
Acquainted
with Mission
Context

5

part of this exercise comes during the debriefing. The teams should assemble again at your initial meeting place. Here you should have refreshments and a flip chart or chalk board. Ask each observer to give a brief verbal report and encourage the entire group to join in a discussion of what they saw and what it means to your ministry goals.

What kind of neighborhood is this? Where does it fit in the overall picture? What can you conclude from the types of homes and buildings? From the location of the community relative to the metropolitan area in general or the rural region?

What needs seem to exist in the community? Did you observe lots of children with few places to play, or men standing on street corners during the work day? Are these indicators of the need for children's ministries or job programs? Are there indicators of poverty, or do these homes appear to house affluent people who may experience stress and a higher incidence of heart disease? Are there many outlets for alcoholic beverages?

- What kind of neighborhood is this?
- What needs seem to exist in the community?
- What churches did you see?
- What kind of people live in this community?
- Does anyone have immediate ideas that should be acted upon right away?

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What churches did you see? What denominations and faiths are present in the community? Do the church buildings look prosperous and well-maintained, or small and run-down? Are there any storefront churches, or churches with innovative locations in shopping malls and names like "Victory Family Life Center"? Do the churches have plenty of parking, which might indicate the members drive in from a distance? What youth activities, schools and community service programs were visible at or associated with the churches?

What kind of people live in this community? Were there symbols of particular cultures or ethnic groups? Are these young families with children, or older folk? Did you see many religious symbols in windows, on homes or cars? What did you notice about how they dressed, did they walk or drive? Did you see joggers or games being played in community parks?

Does anyone have immediate ideas that should be acted upon right away? Is it the consensus of the group that there are some specific steps that should be taken immediately? For example, did someone see a potential meeting place that should be inquired about? Or, did one of the teams stumble into an immediate opportunity for a service project that would be visible in the neighborhood? Or, did someone start a conversation with an individual who has requested printed materials, a video or a Bible study?

As you summarize the reports of the observers, some key realities will emerge. These observations will help you understand the abstract data available from demographic statistics, and visual real people and the real life of a community as you study maps
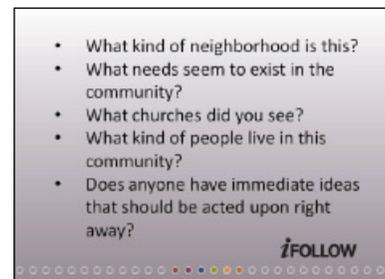
and documents. Some of the data you gather may seem to contradict what was seen in the "windshield survey." Even though a visual scan is not as scientific as census data, which such contradictions come to mind, they do provide opportunities to learn more by asking questions and digging a little deeper. It is impossible to really understand a community without actually cruising the streets and eye-balling the homes, stores, churches and people.

Demographic Profile

In the information age, the use of demographics has become an integral part of church ministry. The word literally means, "documenting people." Demos is an ancient Greek word for people or a segment of the population, and graphos is the Greek word for writing or documentation. Just as the invention of photography and publications like *National Geographic* helped a generation of North Americans to open its eyes to natural wonders and cultures around the world, so the invention of the computer and demographics have made it possible to see and understand trends and dynamics on a vast scale; the births, lives and deaths of entire populations.

Demographic information has become readily accessible to leaders of congregations through the census offices of both the United States and Canada. Today, there are also many other sources of demographic data being marketed to business executives, as well as some tailored for nonprofit organizations and Christian ministries.

In practical terms, "demographics" refers to such things as location of residence, income level, education attained, marital status, etc. It is within this context that demographic statisticians study the size, density, distribution, and vital statistics of people groups. For example, the United States population is about 281 million in the 2000 Census. Official projections indicate that it will grow to 300 million by 2010, 400 million around 2050 and 571 million by the end of the century. (U.S. Census, Table DP-1; Healy) The increase will come primarily from a decrease in death rates and an increase in birth rates, both related to better health conditions and longer life spans. Immigration, which has long played a key role in population growth in America, will actually decrease by about 25% over the first two decades of the century and then slowly move to higher levels. With these demographic

Demographic Profile

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trends in view, what are the implications for the Church? Specifically, how will the Church plan for the expected explosion of older adult population which is projected to grow 108 percent by 2030 to 70 million and will account for one in five Americans compared to one in ten today?

How can you use demographics to get acquainted with your target group? How will demographics help you understand your community better, so your Mission Group can reach people more effectively and start new ministries or plant a church in an unreached area?

A typical demographic report is shown in Handout 2. It is from the U.S. Census. If your ministry area consists of only one Zip Code or town, the information is more straight forward. If you have two or more communities or neighborhoods, you will want to be aware of how they compare with each other. The book *Understanding Your Community* provides tools to compare the Zip Codes within your community.

What do the Terms Mean?

You may discover many unfamiliar terms as you look over a demographic report. These are technical terms, and each has a specific, defined meaning. It is important that you keep the definitions in mind as you study the information, or you may run the risk of drawing wrong conclusions. (In the book *Understanding Your Community*, Chapter 4 includes quick and simple definitions of all the terms used in demographic reports, as well as indication of how to understand the various numbers. In this chapter there are also explanations of what the demographic data mean for church growth and evangelism.)

Here are some of the most important definitions:

Population vs. Households—The total number of people living in a community is called the "population." This is not just adults, but people of all ages and conditions from the newborn to the eldest. "Household" refers to a home or living unit—an apartment, a single-family house, etc. Some households are occupied by families. Other households are occupied by a single adult living alone, while other are oc-cupied by two or more single adults who may simply be roommates, a single home-owner renting out a room, two siblings sharing a home, or in some cases couples who are cohabiting. "Household" is a more generic term than "family," which is the one you may naturally use.

Age vs. Generations—Age data show the percentage of the population in each age category in the year the count was taken. The "median age" means that half of the people in your community are older than this age and half are younger. It is a quick marker for the relative age profile of a community. The median age for the United States was 35 in the 2000 census. (U.S. Census, Table DP-1) It changes on a yearly basis. Is the median age in your community younger or older than this national norm? If the median age in your commu-

What do the Terms Mean?

- Population vs. Households
- Age vs. Generations
- Race vs. Ethnicity

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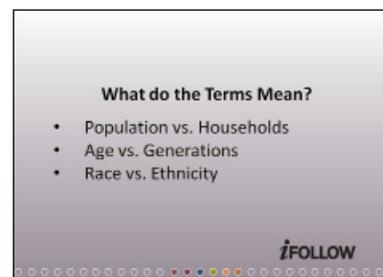
nity is higher than this, it indicates that your community has more older people. If the median age in your community is below 35, it indicates that your community has more younger people.

Age groups are fixed stages of life through which individuals grow, going on to the next category. Generations are cohorts that move with people as they grow older. A generation is made up of all the people born in certain years. They go through childhood together, the adolescence together, then young adulthood together, start families together and into middle-age and senior years together. Much attention has been given in recent years to understanding how major, shared cultural influences—especially during the teen and young adult years—shape a generation throughout its life time. (See Neil Howe and William Strauss, *Generations: The History of America's Future,* 1584 to 2069: 1991, Perennial)

The current generations in North America, as defined by the American Demographic Institute:

World War II generation, born 1909-1932

Swing generation, born 1933-1945

Baby Boom generation, born 1946-1964

Baby Bust generation ("Gen X"), born 1965-1976

Millennial generation, born 1977-1994

Unnamed new generation, born 1995 and later

Race vs. Ethnicity—Race is a concept that is based on unscientific assumptions. More recently, there has been a shift to the "ethnicity." While race is supposedly based on genetics and it is assumed that a person has a particular race by accident of birth, whether they accept it or not, "ethnicity" is based on culture. Culture is learned in childhood and individuals have some freedom in self-identifying their ethnicity. Ethnicity also allows for the inclusion one of the largest minority segments in North America today—Hispanics—which is not defined by race. Unfortunately, census data is still largely defined by concepts of "race." Some progress has been made, showing race and some ethnicities side by side. Respondents were allowed to identify themselves as having more than one race, so the first count shows the breakout of those reporting "one race," while all of the people reporting "two or more races" are counted together on one line at the bottom. A second count displays everyone who described themselves as part of a race, including those who are counted on two or more lines in different racial segments. This produces a total of more than 100% because some people are counted twice.

Education—A person's level of education is a major factor in shaping their values and attitudes. The education profile of your community will tell you a lot about the needs

and interests of the residents. "Educational attainment" data include only adults 25 years of age and older—after they are expected to have completed their education. The amount of education that the adults in your community have completed is a good clue to the lifestyle and culture of the community. For example, those with less education are usually not able to get the highest-paying jobs and, therefore, this is often related to lower incomes as well as needs for job training programs as the economy becomes more and more technology-driven. It is also a very strong indicator of the way the gospel must be communicated to be understood. Those with less education need a basic, simple message, while those with more education will respond to a more nuanced and complex message.

People on the Move—Mobility is a demographic factor that has a high correlation to church growth among Adventist congregations. (Dudley, Wrenn and Saliba) "Residence in 1995" is the section of the 2000 census reports that measures the percentage of people in your community who have moved in recent years. More recent updates will use a different start date because the census measures the number of people who moved in the last five years. Some 54% of Americans lived in the same house in 2000 that they did five years earlier. That means 46% had moved—25% within the same county, 10% to a different county in the same state, 8% to a different state, and 3% from outside the country. If your community has higher percentages of current residents who have moved recently, it is more likely to be responsive to appropriate evangelism. Church planting projects are more likely to be successful in communities with higher percentages of newcomers.
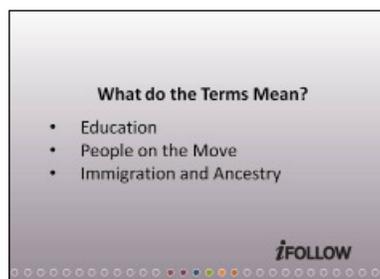

Immigration and Ancestry—Both the United States and Canada have a rich tradition of immigration. People have moved here from all over the world to find freedom and opportunity. Except for a small percentage of native people, almost everyone in North America has roots in Europe, Africa, Asia or Latin America. Immigration continues today and provides an important opportunity for ministry. "Native born" refers to those who were born as citizens here. "Foreign born" is the number of current residents who were not born with citizenship. These people are in this country as immigrants. "Ancestry" includes more than just immigrants. In the U.S. Census people are permitted to claim ancestry no matter how many generations have passed since their immigrant forebearers arrived. Almost all Americans claim some foreign ancestry.

Employment—How people make a living is a very important part of their life, especially in today's world when most North Americans spend more time at their jobs than they do at home. Because of concern about unemployment, some of these data are updated every month and posted on a website operated by an agency of the

iFollow
Discipleship
Series:
Working
with Jesus

Action Plan
& Presenter
Notes

**Mission
Group
Process**
Part Five:
Getting
Acquainted
with Mission
Context

10

government. "Labor force" counts the people who are either employed or looking for work among the total population age 16 and older. "Not in labor force" are people who are retired or no longer working or looking for work, including full-time homemakers and students who do not want a job, even part time. Employment data are also broken down to ways, one showing "occupation" or the kind of job a person has and the other showing "industry" or what kind of business a person works for.

Household Income—These data indicate the economic profile of your community. Annual household income means the total amount of earnings coming into a family or to a single person living alone during a given year. These data are often displayed as a percentage of the total households. The "median household income" is usually considered to be a more revealing measure of the economic status of a community than any other. Half of the households in the community have annual incomes lower than this figure, and half are higher.
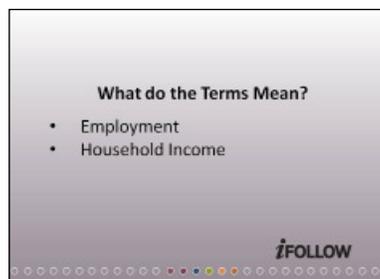
Religious Profile of Your Community

The typical approach to evangelism used by the Adventist Church reveals a number of unstated assumptions about the people in the community. These assumptions are about what people already know about religion before they step into the first meeting. For example, it is assumed that people know that there are "books" in the Bible and that they know the names of at least some of the books and approximately what order they are in. It is assumed that people have heard hymns sung before and understand phrases such as "the crimson flood" or "that thou might'st ransomed be." It is assumed that people know not to answer when the preacher asks a rhetorical question or stand up and interrupt the sermon when they have a question.

I could list many more of these assumptions. All together they make a package or cultural framework which might be labeled "revivalism," a way of doing things in religious meetings associated with the conservative, Protestant stream of American religion. This is an approach familiar to Baptists, Pentecostals and a number of smaller denominations, as well as some Methodists, Lutherans, Presbyterians and others in "mainstream" Protestant churches. But to Catholics, Jews, the Orthodox and

"high church" Protestants it is largely unfamiliar. To the large majority of Americans who never attend any worship it is almost entirely unknown and even confusing.

To what extent can you safely make these assumptions in about your target group? Do you know the religious background of the people in this community? How many are currently active in any faith? Is it safe to make generalizations based on conversations that you have had from time to time with work associates, neighbors or relatives? Most people are comfortable having conversations about "touchy" topics, such as religion, only with those with whom they share some basic assumptions. It is almost impossible to assume that you have talked about religion with a random sample of your community.

The religious landscape in America is changing. Members of the Spencerville Adventist church in Maryland have watched with amazement as all the world's religions have come to New Hampshire Avenue, the suburban road on which their church sits. An Islamic mosque, a Buddhist shrine, a Hindu community center, and an Eastern Orthodox church have joined the Jewish synagogue and Roman Catholic, Lutheran and Christian and Missionary Alliance (CMA) churches which already existed along a stretch of a few miles. "It is a different world now," a layman who helped start the Spencerville congregation in the 1960s told me, slowly shaking his head.

How to Get a Religious Profile for Your Community

Where can you get reliable, comprehensive information about the religions in your community? Although the census in Canada continues to provide data every ten years about religion in that country, since 1950 the U.S. Census has stopped asking questions about religion in order to protect the separation of church and state required by the constitution. In the late 1960s, the Glenmary Research Center brought together a collaborative effort of more than 100 of the largest faith groups in the U.S. and has published a detailed data base every ten years, starting in 1970. These data are provided at the county level so that you can see the religious profile of your county—the number of congregations of each denomination and faith group, the total number of members and adherents, as well as the percentage of the total population and the percentage of all members of all faiths. These data are published every ten years as the Religious Congregations and Membership Study (RCMS).

You can get the profile for your community directly from the ARDA database via the Internet. These data list each religion with the number of congregations, members and adherents as well as a graphic summary of the five major clusters of denominations and faiths. [See the PowerPoint slides.] The raw data includes in-

How to Get a Religious Profile for Your Community

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dividual listings for 186 denominations and religions. Together they account for more than 99% of the people affiliated with any religion in the United States today.

Here is a quick explanation of the six major "denominational groups" in the graphic part of the report. The book *Understanding Your Community* includes more detailed information as well as sources of additional information on each denomination and materials on how to best relate Adventist faith to each segment.

Evangelical Protestants—One in seven Americans belongs to a conservative Protestant or Evangelical church, such as the Southern Baptist Convention, Assemblies of God, the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and many smaller groups. The conservative Protestant world is very fragmented. Born-again Christianity is not a monolithic organization. In fact, it is "a complex assemblage of traditions and subtraditions, denominations and independent ministries, distinct from one another in emphasis yet overlapping in doctrinal and moral formulations. … What binds them into a transdenominational identity is a spirituality rooted in traditional Christian theology," yet reinterpreted in the 20th century to combine the experience of "a personal God … a personal relationship with Jesus Christ" with contemporary sensibilities. (Roof 1990, p 183) It includes Evangelical, fundamentalist, charismatic and other segments. The Seventh-day Adventist Church is included in this cluster.
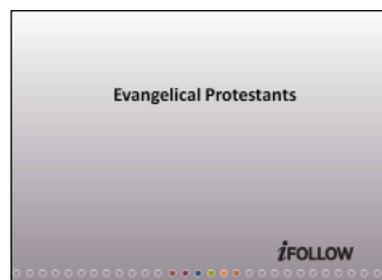
Mainstream Protestants—One in eight Americans belongs to a "mainline" Protestant church such as the United Methodist Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Presbyterian Church USA, the Episcopal Church, the American Baptist Church, the United Church of Christ and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). Each of these are entirely American denominations, although most have associations with denominations in the same faith tradition around the world. These churches have a long history in America and are called "mainline" in part because their history is intertwined with American history and culture. (Finke and Stark) George Washington, Thomas Jefferson and the other founders of the United States all belonged to these faiths. In fact, to this day the majority of government and business leaders in America are members of these denominations. They continue to have significant influence in American culture despite the fact that they now constitute a smaller share of the population than the Evangelicals. Almost every community in America has a Methodist congregation and most have one from the other "mainline" denominations.
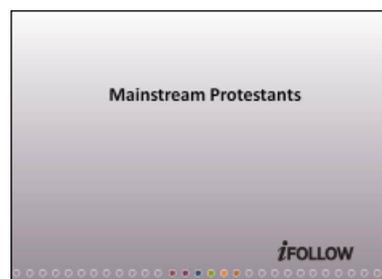

Orthodox—These are Christians from the "eastern" tradition of that goes back to the 11th century when the Christian bishops in what is

today Greece, Serbia, Romania, Bulgaria, Russia, Cyprus and the middle east refused to recognize the authority of the Pope in Rome. Since that great schism, the "eastern" wing of Christendom has been a separate community, actually made up of national churches in each country. Depending on political currents, these denominations have been throughout long periods the established, state churches. In America today they exist largely within identifiable immigrant communities from that part of the world, although in many cases the adherents have been in the new world for several generations. There are nearly 2 million people in the U.S. who belong to Orthodox parishes which exist in at least 350 cities.

Catholic—One in five Americans is a Roman Catholic. It is the largest faith group in the nation with about 62 million adherents. In about a third of the counties across the U.S. the Catholic Church is the predominate religion. In many counties in New England, New York, New Jersey, California, Arizona, New Mexico and south Texas the majority of the population is Catholic. The same is true in fewer counties around Chicago, Detroit and Baltimore and in southern Louisiana. Throughout the Midwest there is a scattering of Catholic counties. Where there is a strong Catholic presence, it tends to dominate the culture in many ways. Throughout the 18th century and the first half of the 19th century, America was largely a Protestant country. Large numbers of Catholics arrived in the cities of the northeast during the massive immigration from Europe which swelled the American population from the 1870s through the 1920s. By the 1890s a major "culture war" had arisen between the dominant Protestant culture of rural and small-town America and the emerging immigrant, Catholic communities based in the large cities. Because they were both newcomers, with different languages and customs, and a religious minority, these Catholic communities did not rapidly join the "melting pot." There are still many identifiably Italian, Polish, German, Irish and similar neighborhoods in New York, Boston, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Pittsburgh, Cleveland, Detroit and Chicago as well as smaller metropolitan areas in the northeast and elsewhere. The Catholic Church is one of the most important institutions in these communities.
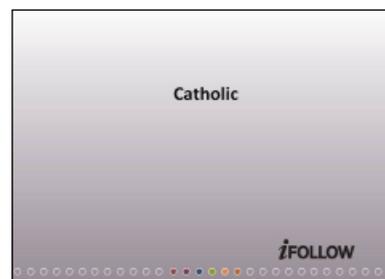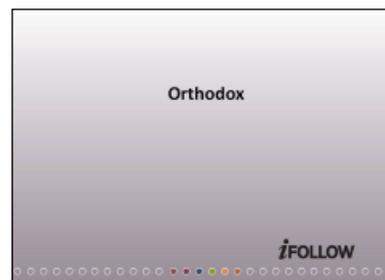
Other—There are a growing variety of religions in America. About 6.1 million Americans are Jews. There are neighborhoods in each of the major metropolitan areas of the northeast, as well as some cities in California and Florida, which have large numbers of Jewish residents. Some are historically Jewish communities. (Singer and Seldin)

There are nearly 4.2 million adherents of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day

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with Jesus

Action Plan
& Presenter
Notes

**Mission
Group
Process**
Part Five:
Getting
Acquainted
with Mission
Context

15

Saints (LDS) or "Mormons" in the U.S. They dominate a region of about 80 counties in the Rocky Mountain region running from southern Idaho down through western Wyoming, the entire state of Utah, eastern Nevada and northern Arizona. There are LDS congregations in about half the counties in the rest of the country.

The news media have reported that there may be as many as 4 million Muslims in the U.S., but the best current estimate is 1.6 million. Islamic centers are being built in more and more cities. There are about 1.3 million Jehovah's Witnesses in the U.S. and it has local branches in most counties. There are more than a million people in the U.S. who indicate that they identify with Buddhist religion. There are about 766,000 Hindu believers in the U.S., almost all of them found in a few major metropolitan areas where there is a South Asian community. As many as a million Americans report that they are part of various "new religions" such as Scientology, the Unification Church, New Age groups, etc. (Kosmin, Mayer and Keysar) The early 21st century has proved to be a fertile time for spirituality and with widespread disenchantment with the established religions, new religions are emerging at a rapid rate. Some are simply cults which get much more public attention than their numbers actually justify. Others are on their way to becoming widely accepted belief systems that may become competitors for the hearts and minds of new generations of believers.

Unclaimed—This is the term used for those are not affiliated with any religion, those who are more often called the "unchurched." This is the largest segment of Americans, nearly half (45%) the population. In addition to the people who have no religious affiliation, a third to a half of the 55% who are included in the membership statistics are "dropouts" who have not attended a local congregation for a year or more. When these individuals are also included in the picture, it leaves no more than a third of Americans—and perhaps as few as one in four—who regularly participate in some religion. In much of North America, especially the large cities and their suburbs, the church today faces a secular mission. Although 95 percent of Americans indicate to pollsters that they believe in God, only 31 percent say religion is "very important" in their lives. In fact, 72 percent state a religious "preference," a faith that they identify with even though they do not participate in its activities.

## Doing a Community Survey or Needs Assessment

It takes considerable work, but it is possible to learn a lot more about the people who live in a community and their needs by conducting a survey of the general public. Full details on how to do this and a selection of test in-

struments that can be used are included in the book *Understanding Your Community* which you can obtain from AdventSource.

Handouts in this Package

1. Target Group Worksheet
2. Sources of Demographics
3. How to Get Your Religious Profile on the Web
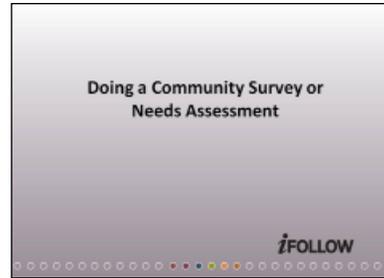
Additional Resources

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Discussion Questions

1.   Why is it important for a Mission Group to learn all it can about the target community or people group? Beyond the practical issues, what spiritual principle is involved in this task?

2.   What do we know about the demographics of our local community? What do these realities tell us about the needs of the people?

3.   What do we know about the religious profile of our local community? What does this profile tell us about the needs of the values and traditions of the people?

4.   What more do we need to learn about our community? Make a list.

Group Activity

Purpose: To understand demographic information about a neighborhood or town and relate that information to guesses about the needs of the people and suggestions for ways to respond to these needs through Christian ministry.

Preparation:

1. Decide on a Zip Code or Postal Code area or a town to use in this exercise.

2. Go online and download the demographic profile. (Specific instructions are given in the book *Understanding Your Community.*) Make copies to hand out to the group.

3. Prepare a large sheet of paper of the type that comes on large rolls and is rolled out to cover tables for potlucks and picnics. You will need a piece about 12 feet wide and a wall with sufficient clear space to put it up. [An alternative way to accomplish the same thing is to have four flip charts sitting next to each other in a row across the front of the room, or to place four sheets of flip chart paper up on the wall in a row.]

4. Divide the large sheet of paper into four columns (or use the four flip charts). Label each column as shown in the box on this page.

DEMOGRAPHICS	NATIONAL NORMS	NEEDS	WHAT TO DO?
Median age 44	Median age 36	Aging	Start seniors club
10% under five	6% under five	Day care	Mother's morning out

Assignment: The group will place items under "Demographics" and "National Norms" from the handout and then use brainstorming on each item to identify likely needs represented by the demographic items, as well as action steps that can be taken to meet the needs. Take each item one at a time. Do not go on to the next item until the group has come up with at least one need suggested by the item and at least one action step that could be taken.

Timing: You can spend 30 to 90 minutes in listing items from the demographic report and brain-storming what these items mean and what could be done about them. Be sure to reserve at least 15 minutes to quickly prioritize the items listed. Which needs/action steps does the group believe to be most important at this time?

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Group
Activities

**Mission
Group
Process**
Part Five:
Getting
Acquainted
with Mission
Context

19

HANDOUT 1

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HANDOUT

Target Group Work Sheet

1. Name of group: _____

2. How many of this type of person lives in your community? _____

3. What are the conditions that have the greatest influence on the values and life-style of this group? (economic, cultural, social, housing, transportation, occupational, intellectual, spiritual)

**Mission
Group
Process**
Part Five:
Getting
Acquainted
with Mission
Context

4. What are the pressing needs they struggle with?

5. Where does your target group live? (Where in the city or county? What type of neighborhoods? What kind of housing? Can you place them on a map?)

6. Where does your target group work? (What kinds of jobs? What level of education is required? Where are the jobs located in the city? What kinds of facilities do they work in?)

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HANDOUT

7. Where does your target group play? (What kinds of recreation do they typically involve themselves in? Where does this recreation take place?)

**Mission
Group
Process**
Part Five:
Getting
Acquainted
with Mission
Context

8. What type of people does your target group seek as friends? (The same kind of people? Different kinds of people?) How are friendships started and carried on?

9. Where does your target group get information? (Which radio and television channels do they listen to/watch? Which publications do they read? What sections of the newspaper appeal to them?) What organizations do they belong to? What churches do they attend?

10. What would it be like to be a close, personal friend of a member of this target group?