Lesson Plan & Study Guide

Understanding Your Community

Part Three: Religious Profile

Working with Jesus

iFOLLOW

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.

Credits

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Understanding Your Community, Part Three: Religious Profile

This is the third in a series of six units designed to provide basic training in community assessment.

Learning Objectives

1. Learn how to obtain the religious profile for the local community

2. Review the various denominations and faiths in the local community

3. Understand how the religious background of the residents may influence their attitudes toward the Adventist message and outreach activities

4. Learn of the specific tools and resources available for each religious background

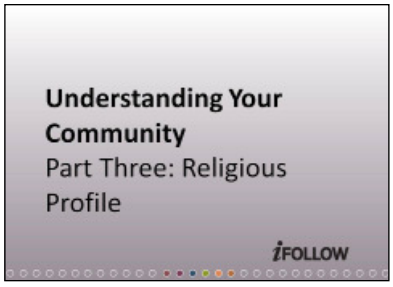
Content Outline

A. How to get a religious profile of the local community

B. Major sectors of religion in North America

C. Review of various faiths and the resources available regarding each

D. The concept of market share and how it applies to evangelistic planning



Background Material for the Presenter

When we conduct public evangelism we use a certain translation of the Bible; we use certain types of music and other approaches that reveal a number of unstated assumptions about the people in the community. These are assumptions 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 and understand certain kinds of religious music. 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 is related to a certain religious background.

To what extent can you safely make these assumptions in your community? Do you know the religious background of the general public? How many are currently active in any faith? 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 we get reliable, comprehensive information about the religions in our 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).

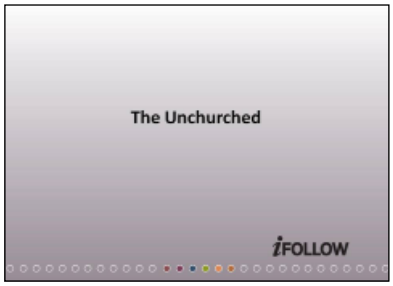
You can get the profile for your community either directly from the ARDA database via the Internet, or you can contact the Center for Metropolitan Ministry at Columbia Union College and purchase a profile for your county or state. These data list each religion with the number of congregations, members and adherents as well as a graphic summary of the five major clusters of denominations and faiths shown in Handout 1. The raw data includes individual listings for 186 denominations and religions. Together they account for more than 99 percent of the people affiliated with any religion in the United States today.

(Instructions for how to get a profile from the Internet are included in Handout 2.)

Many of these religious groups are quite small and difficult to recognize by name or differentiate from similar groups. Very few individuals would be able to immediately recognize the beliefs and orientation of the majority of these groups. The simplified presentation in Figure 8 gives a much more "user friendly" tool to understand the religious profile of the nation. The graphics in the RCMS report will provide a similar profile for your county.

In this session we will review these major segments with information on the largest denominations in each category. References are provided for sources of additional information on faiths and denominations that may be of particular interest because they have a significant presence in your community. Materials on how to best relate Adventist faith to each segment are also listed where they are known to be available and the need for such materials suggested in some cases.

The Unchurched



The largest segment of Americans is the "unchurched." Nearly half (45 percent) are not affiliated with any denomination or faith. These are listed in the RCMS data as "unclaimed" because the data from none of the religions includes these individuals as adherents.

In addition to the people who have no religious affiliation, a third to a half of the 55 percent who are included in the membership statistics are "dropouts" who have not attended a local congregation of their faith for a year or more. When these individuals are 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.

If your county has more than 45 percent unchurched population, then this is an issue that you cannot afford to ignore if you are serious about the mission of Christ. If your county has less than 45 percent unchurched population it is likely that you are located in "the Bible Belt" or areas in the center of the continent where religion is stronger. The unchurched group includes more men, younger persons, residents of the East and West coasts, and single adults. By contrast, the active member group includes more women, older persons, and residents of the Midwest and the South.

The word "Christo-pagan" is sometimes used to describe the secular, yet formally religious culture that dominates North America today: A culture in which religion is defined as entirely private, and therefore unrelated to public issues, business or professional behavior and common values.

Jard DeVille, a Christian psychologist, writes that secular culture includes many individuals who have no spiritual commitments and function on the basis of two principles. The first is, "If it feels good, do it." The second is, "If it is to your advantage, control it." Mental-health professionals report in recent decades that "narcissists"—self-centered, self-pitying persons—have become the dominant type of patient and in the book *The Culture of Narcissism,* Christopher Lasch relates this trend to the development of a secular culture in North America.

People who operate on these self-gratifying principles, without any spiritual reflection or discipline, often avoid getting closely involved with others. They fear becoming emotionally dependent and find it easier to handle instantaneous intimacy than deep, long-term commitments. They may be sexually promiscuous or use psychoactive substances. They often express a sense of inner emptiness and dissatisfaction with their lives. They tend to crave vivid emotional experiences and feel that others should gratify them, yet they have little interest in helping others. They are terrified of growing old and of death.

It is very difficult to interest the typical unchurched person in any type of church-related activity. They tend to be distrustful of the institutional church and uncomfortable with organized religion, even when they have a strong interest in spirituality. These attitudes have been powerfully reinforced by the repeated public scandals in recent years in which religious leaders have been revealed to be predatory sexual abusers, involved in financial fraud and dishonest.

At the same time, a 1989 survey by the Barna Research Group indicates that as many as one third of the unchurched would consider visiting a religious event under certain conditions. "The unchurched today are, by many measures, more religious than they were a decade ago," states George Gallup in comparing studies done by the Princeton Religion Research Center. Although his surveys consistently give a more conservative picture of American public opinion than do most other pollsters, it is still interesting that they indicate that 72 percent of the unchurched believe "Jesus is God or the Son of God," 63 percent believe "the Bible is the literal or inspired word of God," and 44 percent say they once made a commitment to Christ.

Gallup also shows that the unchurched are less active than the churched in non-religious civic, social and charitable activities. While 35 percent of church members are active or very active in community events of a non-religious nature, only 14 percent of the unchurched report the same level of involvements. The majority of the unchurched say they are not active at all in civic, recreational or charitable programs. (Gallup, Jr.,1988; Gallup, Jr., and Jones, 2000)

The unchurched are not so much hostile toward Christian ideas as they are uninitiated

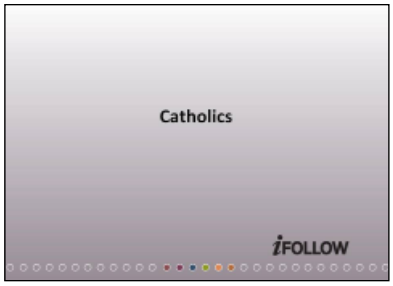
and disinterested in the kinds of activities characteristic of church-related programs. For example, when Gallup's interviewers asked the unchurched, "Are there any programs in which you or someone in your immediate family might be interested in participating?" the largest number mentioned summer activities for children and youth, programs for meeting human needs, family-oriented dinners and outings, recre-ation and camping programs, youth groups and "a place where we could go for emergency needs." Less than one in twenty mentioned prayer meetings or Sunday School, and less than one in ten stated an interest in weekend spiritual retreats or neighborhood Bible study groups.

Bill Hybels, who founded Willow Creek Community Church in a suburb of Chicago in 1975, has built a successful ministry with the express purpose of reaching out to the un-churched. He began with a door-to-door survey in the neighborhood and 125 core mem-bers. "Most non-churched people we talked to," remembers Hybels, "said that church is (1) boring, (2) predictable, and (3) irrelevant." The unchurched "do not want to be asked to say, sing, sign or give anything." When they visit a church they "are confused by un-written rules about when to sit and stand." Hybels "took this information very seriously" and designed a worship service which would "provide a non-threatening environment for those who wish to investigate the claims of Christ" and make it possible "to establish significant relationships with non-churched people." Today he has more than 20,000 members.

When you visit Willow Creek no one will ask your name, give you a name tag or other device to wear, or a card to fill out. You won't be asked to sign a guest book, to stand or even raise your hand. "Our church has visitors each week who are Jewish, Catholic, Hindu, or completely unchurched," says associate pastor Don Cousins. "Many of these first-tim-ers are uncomfortable with even our basic songs and prayers, not to mention the suspi-cion that they might be asked to speak or to find a Bible verse." So public prayers are simple, basic and conversational; using every-day language. Worship leaders are relaxed and somewhat informal, make use of appropriate humor and try to project a feeling of warmth. The service is focused on the need for creativity. "If you traditionally start slowly or tend to get the announcements out of the way first," says Cousins, "it is hard to pick up the momentum. We try to start strong, usually with music, and then vary the intensity level. It's better to do a few things well than a lot of things poorly."

Experiments like Willow Creek and a number of Adventist congregations demonstrate that the unchurched can be evangelized. The difficulty is that it requires a different ap-proach than many church members find comfortable. Ministry with the unchurched often creates significant tension within the congregation; a tug-of-war between the tastes and needs of long-term church members and the needs that must be met in order to reach out to the unchurched in the community. In order to start an outreach to the unchurched it is essential that your church leaders "count the cost" and determine if they are ready to "go on mission." It often involves a choice between faithfulness to tradition or faithfulness to mission.

Catholics



One in five Americans is a Roman Catholic. It is the largest faith group in the nation with about 62 million adherents. (National Council, *Yearbook*) 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. (See the full color map of "Major Denominational Families by Counties of the United States" inserted with each edition of *Churches and Church Membership in the United States.*) 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. Of course, the French settlers in southern Louisiana and the Mexicans living in the southwest where already Catholic, when the United States took over these territories. 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.

In the post World War II era, "second generation" immigrants of Catholic faith have gained education, increased wealth and status, and become more integrated with mainstream American culture. Many have moved into the new suburbs built in the 1950s and more recent decades. Although there are significant numbers of traditional Catholics, most of the new generation have been deeply influenced by Protestant viewpoints and do not accept key Catholic teachings. The authority of the Pope has been modified in the eyes of most American Catholics today, growing up under the influence of democratic principles and individualistic values. About three out of four disagree with the papal mandate against birth control. Smaller majorities ignore other *ex cathedra* positions taught by the Church. Significant numbers of Catholics marry Protestants, Jews and even nonbelievers. (Froehle and Gautier; Greeley) There have been tensions between American Catholic leaders (lay and clergy) and Pope John-Paul II, who comes from a more traditional

background in an eastern European country long cut-off from western influences, and the bishops he has appointed.

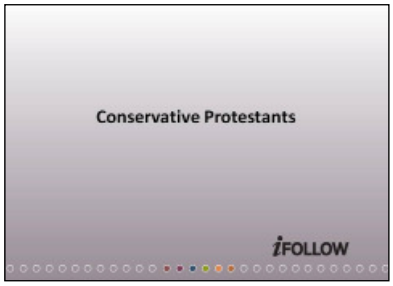
Today, nearly every county in America has at least one Catholic parish. There is a severe shortage of priests and some parishes are led by a "pastoral administrator," a nun or lay person who provides most, but not all of the functions of a priest. Most Catholic leaders are interested in being "good neighbors" in the community and have long ago left behind their traditional stand-offish, separatist stance. In most cases you will find them willing to cooperate with Adventists in community events and programs, and not significantly prejudiced against the Adventist Church. This is not necessarily because they have a lot of information about the Adventist Church, but more often due to their commitment to ecumenical principles.

People in your community who have grown up with a Catholic background are used to a more formal approach to worship and a largely different set of hymns than those used in conservative Protestant denominations. They expect scripture readings, responsive readings, and prayers to be a more central element in worship than the sermon. They are accustomed to rather short sermons in most cases and more music performed by choirs and soloists than congregational singing. They expect pastors to be involved in community affairs and social concern as well as pastoral care and evangelism. They are used to clergy who are well educated and cosmopolitan in experience and perspective.

The Adventist message can easily be shared with many Catholics, especially those who have attended parochial schools and have some education in the Bible. It is also true that there is a full range of attitudes and perspectives among American Catholics, including those who are quite secularized and those who have very traditional views. Significant numbers of former Catholics have joined the Adventist Church. Often these are individuals who became inactive in the Catholic Church some time before they first became aware of Adventist faith. George Vandeman included a chapter on "What I Like About Catholics" in his book *What I Like About* ... Mark Finley includes notes comparing Adventist doctrines with Catholic beliefs in *Studying Together.* The late Samuele Bacciocchi, a professor at Andrews University, wrote a doctoral dissertation at the Gregorian University in Rome which was published as the book *From Sabbath to Sunday.*

Conservative Protestants

One in seven Americans belongs to a conservative Protestant church. The three largest conservative denominations are the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) with 20 million members, the Assemblies of God with 2.6 million members, and the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod with 2.5 million members. Southern Baptist churches are present in 2,500 of the 3,100 counties in the U.S. There is a solid belt of



1,300 counties across Virginia, the Carolinas, Tennessee, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, Texas and the southern half of West Virginia, Kentucky and Missouri in which Baptists are dominate and the majority of these local churches are affiliated with the SBC. The Assemblies of God make up the largest Pentecostal or charismatic denomination in the country and have a local ministry in 2,600 of the 3,100 counties in the U.S. Missouri Synod-affiliated Lutheran congregations are present in about half the counties in the country, concentrated in the Midwest. This denomination represents the smaller and more conservative portion of Lutheranism in America.

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 sub-traditions, 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, p. 183) It includes Evangelical, fundamentalist, charismatic and other segments.

The fundamentalist organizations tend to be small and suffer from constant splits. Consequently, each denomination will be present in only a few counties across the U.S., although there is usually at least one small fundamentalist congregation—of some denomination—in each county. Fundamentalist churches are much more concentrated in Appalachia, the South and the Midwest.

The Pentecostal or charismatic movement is currently the fastest-growing Christian segment in North America. The largest denomination, as mentioned above, is the Assemblies of God with 2.6 million members and present in most counties in the U.S., except in New England and the upper Midwest. Other, smaller organizations include the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel and the Pentecostal Holiness Church. Many charismatic groups also exist within the Catholic Church and mainstream Protestant denominations.

A large sector among the conservative Protestant churches is made up of the historically African American denominations. An argument could be made for placing most of these in the mainstream Protestant category, referencing their involvement in the civil rights movement and other social action projects. Yet, their theology and practice on all other issues clearly places them in the conservative Protestant cluster. The largest black denomination is the National Baptist Convention (U.S.A.) with 8.2 million members. This is the oldest and parent convention of black Baptists in America. The Church of God in Christ has 5.5 million members and the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church has 3.5 million members. The AME Church is the original black denomination, emerging

soon after the founding of the U.S. From it emerged the African Methodist Episcopal Zion (AME Zion) Church which has 1.2 million members today. Various disputes have caused three large black Baptist denominations to break off from the National Baptist Convention over the years; the National Baptist Convention of America with 3.5 million members, the National Missionary Baptist Convention of America with 2.5 million members, and the Progressive National Baptist Convention with 2.5 million members. There are also hundreds of smaller denominations in this category. All of the major African American denominations are found in black communities across America, along with a number of the smaller organizations and unaffiliated local groups.

Other conservative, Protestant denominations each have quite different histories and missions, but share a common reverence for the Bible and a dedication to proclaiming and applying its teachings. The Salvation Army is unique in that it is both the largest charitable organization in America, with massive funding through the United Way and government sources, and a small denomination with 453,000 members and local churches in 778 counties. During the 1990s, it has been the fastest-growing Christian denomination in America.

A conservative movement from 19th century, frontier America which believes that churches should carry only the name of Christ and is largely congregational in its structure continues in two larger denominations as well as a number of small ones. The Churches of Christ with about 1.6 million members and congregations in about 2,000 of the 3,100 counties in the nation, and the Christian Churches and Churches of Christ with 1.5 million members and local churches in half the counties. There are about 50 counties scattered across West Virginia, Ohio, Kentucky, Tennessee, Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, Missouri, Kansas, Oklahoma and Texas where Christian churches are predominate.

The "Quakers" or Religious Society of Friends are an old, English faith and have an important place in Christian history. In America they have split into three or four small denominations, each with fewer than 100,000 members and there are Quaker meeting houses now functioning in only about 650 counties.

The Mennonites and Amish also have a long history of conservative Christian faith and most are able to work together through the Mennonite Central Committee—a humanitarian organization, not a denomination—despite the fact that there are hundreds of small denominations totaling only about 400,000 members all together and present in no more than 500 of the 3,100 counties in the U.S., including seven counties where it is the dominate religion. The Church of the Brethren shares history and beliefs with the Mennonite tradition and has about 140,000 members with congregations in 400 or more counties.

There are at least 2 million people who regularly attend independent, Evangelical congregations. Willow Creek Community Church in the suburbs of Chicago is the best known of these. John Vaughn, director of the International Mega-Church Center, has researched every town and city in the U.S. with a population of 20,000 or more and identified 2,200 independent churches with an average weekly attendance of 300 or more. He surveyed

these churches to get their total adherents.

There are several small, conservative denominations that have their roots in Scandinavian spiritual reform groups of the 19th century. Two of the larger ones are the Baptist General Conference and the Evangelical Free Church of America, each with congregations in only a few hundred counties, largely in the Midwest.

Several groups represent conservative Protestant denominations which split from larger, mainstream Protestant traditions; the Presbyterian Church in America, the Wesleyan Church (from the Methodist tradition), the National Association of Free Will Baptists, and the Christian Reformed Church. Each of these are present in only about one in eight counties.

Of course, the Seventh-day Adventist Church is a conservative Protestant denomination and your congregation would be included in this piece of the overall picture. In North America there are about 1 million Adventists now and we have local churches in 1,800 of the 3,100 counties in the U.S.

All of the denominations in the conservative Protestant cluster share many of the same basic assumptions upon which Adventist doctrine is built. Most of our evangelistic methods fit these believers better than any other group. There are members of the Adventist Church from all of these backgrounds. At the same time, you will find that many of these groups are more defensive in many cases and quick to label Adventists as a "cult" or "not really Christian." (Strong exceptions would be the Salvation Army, the Mennonites and Quakers, who respect Adventists and are open to collaboration on community service projects.) In general, these groups are not as involved in community affairs as are other religions. Their members are strongly connected to their faith and largely resistant to converting to another denomination.

In *What I Like About ...* George Vandeman affirms conservative Protestant views in the chapters on Baptists and Charismatics. The first volume in the Foundations for Faith series, by Morris Venden, presents the doctrines that Adventists share with most of the other conservative Protestant groups. Mark Finley summarizes the teachings of Baptists, Evangelicals and other conservative Protestant groups in *Studying Together* by Mark Finley. In fact, almost all of the outreach literature published by Adventists in recent years would be appropriate to share with a conservative Protestant reader.

Mainline Protestants

One in eight Americans belongs to a "mainline" Protestant church. The largest of these is the United Methodist Church with 10.4 million adherents. Others include the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (5.1 million), the Presbyterian

Church U.S.A. (3.1 million), the Episcopal Church (2.3 million), the American Baptist church (1.8 million), the United Church of Christ (1.7 million) and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) with about one million adherents. 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 conservative Protestants.

Almost every county in America has a Methodist congregation and there is a belt of about 250 counties across Pennsylvania, West Virginia, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, Nebraska and Kansas where the Methodist Church is dominate. The Methodist denomination is split almost evenly between conservatives and a more "mainstream" segment and places much emphasis on tolerance. Methodist pastors and congregations are often very involved in community service and social issues. The Adventist Church has many elements from a Methodist background because Ellen White and other founders came out of the Methodist Church during the Millerite movement. The worship service in a Methodist church looks and sounds very much like the worship service in an Adventist church, and many of the hymns appear in both hymnals. Methodist pastors, like Adventist pastors, are appointed by the conference and moved from time to time. Even today, a significant number of Adventists were once members of the Methodist church. The United Methodist Church and the Seventh-day Adventist Church have maintained a good relationship, cooperating from time to time on community projects and events such as inter-faith Thanksgiving services.

The Lutheran faith has split into a number of denominations in the U.S. The largest membership is in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) which resulted from a merger of three denominations in 1987; the American Lutheran Church, the Lutheran Church in America and the Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches. The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod and other, smaller Lutheran denominations are included in the conservative, Protestant cluster in the previous section of this chapter. In Minnesota, North Dakota, Wisconsin, South Dakota and Iowa there are about 250 counties where Lutherans dominate, as well as a few, scattered counties elsewhere. Even in the 21st century, membership in a Lutheran church is largely related to having ancestors who immigrated from Germany or Scandinavia. Lutherans, even among the "mainstream" Protestants, tend to be more traditional in their faith than most Protestant denominations. Lutheran worship shares with the Adventist Church a focus on Bible-based preaching and some of the same hymns, but it also is akin to Catholic worship with an emphasis on

liturgy. Lutheran representatives have maintained a dialog for some years with leaders of the Adventist Church and that has resulted in a joint statement and joint publication of a book explaining the differences between Lutherans and Adventists on key topics as well as shared beliefs. (*Lutherans & Adventists in Conversation*) A few Lutherans have joined the Adventist Church over the years, but most were no longer active in a Lutheran church for some years before being introduced to Adventist faith.

More than three million Americans belong to the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) It has congregations in 2,400 of the 3,100 counties in the nation, but there are only a handful where Presbyterian faith is dominate. Presbyterians tend to be present in every community, but largely limited to upper-middle class, business and professional families. "Strongly ecumenical in outlook, the Presbyterian Church U.S.A. is the result of at least 10 different denominational mergers over the last 250 years." (*Yearbook,* p. 101) Although the Adventist Church shares some of the Protestant heritage of this faith and is "presbyterian" in structure—meaning that church authority is held by committees, not individual leaders—it has had little dialog or common history. In spite of the fact that worship and hymnody in both denominations is quite similar, it is fair to say that Presbyterians and Adventists have long lived in different social contexts. In recent years, as Adventists in North America have become more middle class, there has been more contact at the informal level between Adventist professionals and business executives and Presbyterian colleagues. Relatively few Presbyterians have become Adventists and almost all of those have come from the smaller, conservative Presbyterian denominations.

The Episcopal Church represents the Anglican tradition in America which started in the 16th century when the King of England severed the British church from papal authority and the Roman Catholic organization. It was the church of many of the founding fathers, and although it has only about 2 million members it continues to have a privileged position in American society. It is the church of many of the wealthiest and most powerful people in the country today, especially among established, upper-class families. There is an Episcopal parish in two out of three counties. Some are large cathedrals, while many are small congregations. In any case, Episcopal priests are often very well-connected in the community power structure and very much involved in community affairs, but there is no county in the U.S. where Episcopalian faith is dominate in numbers. Among Episcopal congregations, some are "high church" with worship that looks more like the Catholic mass, and some are "low church" with a greater resemblance to Adventist worship. There are generally significant differences in culture and style between the Episcopal Church and the forms with which Adventists have become accustomed. Few people join the Adventist Church from an Episcopal background, and Episcopal leaders often have heard little about Adventists. They may think that Adventists are a "cult," yet still extend a hospitable hand of cooperation and friendship in community activities. Some Episcopal members and clergy are very liberal in their theology, while others are quite conservative. Most share many of the basic beliefs that Adventists have in common with other Protestants. Officially, "the historic creeds of Christendom" are the "essential elements of faith and order, along with the primary authority of Holy Scripture and the two chief sacraments of

Baptism and Eucharist," but tolerance and privacy are greatly valued, thus providing opportunity for a wide variety of individual beliefs. (*Yearbook*, page 73)

The American Baptist churches (ABC) and the United Church of Christ (UCC) are about the same size—a million and a half members—and each have congregations in about one out of three counties in the U.S. Except for a handful of counties in the Midwest, neither denomination is dominate anywhere. Both represent the "liberal" wing of a variety of church splits in the 19th century. The UCC was formed in 1957, the culmination of a series of mergers which started in the 1930s and combined the Congregational churches—which have a history largely based in New England, going back to the Puritans—with a number of smaller Protestant denominations, each originally formed out of disagreements with larger, more traditional groups. The first Baptist church in America was formed by Roger Williams in Rhode Island in 1638. William Miller, the evangelist who paved the way for the founding of the Adventist Church, was a Baptist. At the time of the civil war, the Northern Baptist Convention split with the Southern Baptist Convention over the issue of slavery. It adopted the name American Baptist in 1950 with a commitment to "hold the name in trust for all Christians of like faith and mind who desire to bear witness to the historical Baptist convictions in a framework of cooperative Protestantism." (The American Baptist charter) Local, congregational control of theology and program is a central value in both denominations which leads to much variety in views and teachings.

In fact, mainstream Protestantism includes a wide range of opinion and teachings, while at the same time incorporating many common practices. Nearly half of the members of these denominations have more conservative beliefs and might be comfortable in one of the conservative, Evangelical denominations. Even though there are many variations in the style of worship, most mainstream Protestant services will have a familiar feel to Adventists. Preaching and Bible study are core activities. Basic Protestant themes are emphasized. Organ and choir music is most common. Tolerance and unity are two Biblical ideas often emphasized, which enable the spectrum of viewpoints within each of these denominations to continue in fellowship as well as encouraging the high degree of cooperation among these denominations.

All of the mainstream Protestant denominations belong to the National Council of Churches and affiliated state and metropolitan interfaith organizations. They tend to minimize their different traditions and concentrate on "doing good" in the community, finding opportunities for "joint witness" to historic Christian themes. At the same time they are declining in numbers, losing many of their younger members, and constantly involved in organizational retrenchment and budget-cutting. Voices from within these traditions have begun to speak out regarding their need for renewal.

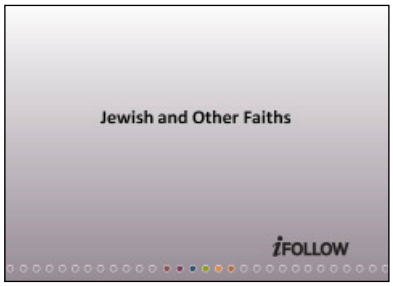
You will find the leaders of these churches highly aware and concerned about social problems in the community, interested in cooperative efforts to address the needs, and often willing to be quite cooperative. Many times these churches will rent to an Adventist congregation when the conservative churches will not. I have been told by a number of Adventist Community Services centers that mainstream, Protestant churches often make

financial contributions or send volunteer groups to help. In a few cases they have provided greater funding than did the sponsoring Adventist congregations and conference.

Significant numbers of the members of these denominations have left and joined more conservative churches or dropped out of Christianity all together. Some have joined the Adventist Church. The median age of the membership in each denomination is above average. The people who remain usually have strong ties in their local churches, and these ties are often more important than denominational creeds or goals.

In the volume *What I Like About ...* George Vandeman has included chapters expressing an Adventist affirmation of Lutherans and Methodists. Morris Venden has produced a three-volume series entitled Foundations for Faith, and the first volume—*Common Ground*—presents the basic doctrines of Christianity which Adventists share with the mainstream Protestant denominations. Mark Finley includes suggestions for understanding how Adventist theology compares with that of Methodists, Lutherans, Presbyterians and others in *Studying Together* by Mark Finley.

Jewish and Other Faiths



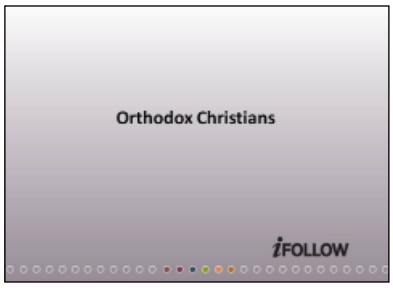
About 6.1 million Americans belong to Judaism, the religion of Jesus and His apostles from which Christianity emerged. What percentage of these are believers or practice the religion is a matter of significant debate, yet the ties to Jewish tradition are strong no matter the personal faith of the individual. There are nearly 4,000 synagogues in the U.S., but most of these are clustered in major metropolitan areas, leaving large numbers of rural counties with no Jewish organization present. There is no county in America where Judaism is dominate. 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. (*American Jewish Year Book*)

Despite repeated urging to make it a priority, little has been done to encourage dialog between Adventists and Jews. With the emergence of "Messianic synagogues"—groups of Jews who also accept Jesus as the Messiah—two or three Adventist congregations have formed along the same lines. The Adventist Church shares some important features with Judaism; the Sabbath, a kosher diet, a knowledge of the Old Testament scriptures, and an almost universal minority status. For a number of years the Church has sponsored the publication of *Shabat Shalom*, a quarterly journal intended to present Adventist perspectives in terms addressed specifically to Jews. In *What I Like About ...* George Vandeman includes a chapter affirming the Jewish faith, and Mark Finley includes a summary of Jewish beliefs in *Studying Together* by Mark Finley. Jacques Doukhan, a professor at Andrews

University, has written Drinking at the *Sources: An appeal to the Jew and the Christian to note their common beginnings.*

There is significant concern among Jews about the survival of their community considering the high percentage of young adults who are marrying Christians in the U.S. Jewish leaders tend to see Messianic synagogues and the very aggressive evangelism of groups like Jews for Jesus as an attack on Judaism that could result in its complete destruction. There is a long, sorry history of Christian antisemitism which has been documented by hundreds of Christian writers and acknowledged by a number of Christian leaders in recent years. In fact, antisemitism is one of the reasons that the Sabbath was replaced by Sunday worship and plays a role in the continued refusal of Catholic and Protestant leaders to seriously consider the issue.

If your church is located near a Jewish community, you are on the frontier of missions! Reaching out to Jewish people is a new area and there are no guidelines or proven programs. You must plan carefully and proceed cautiously. We do not want to be guilty of continuing the sad legacy of Christian aggression against Judaism.



Orthodox Christians--There are nearly 2 million people in the U.S. who belong to Orthodox parishes which exist in at least 350 counties. Orthodox faith goes back to the 11th century when the Christian bishops in what is today Greece, the former Yugoslavia, 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.

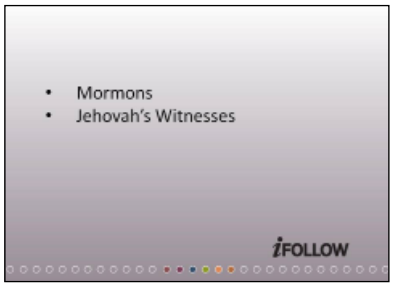
The Nicene creed is accepted by the Orthodox, as it is by all Christians, with the exception of the clause (called the Filioque) which asserts that the Holy Spirit proceeds from Father and the Son. The Eastern church teaches that the Spirit proceeds from the Father only. The Orthodox also accept all of the other doctrinal decrees of the seven Christian councils from A.D. 325 to 787. They agree with Catholics in most of the mediaeval doctrines and practices against which the Reformation protested; tradition as an equal authority with Scripture, the worship of Mary and saints, justification by faith and works, transubstantiation, prayers for the dead, a hierarchy of bishops, and a number of religious rites and ceremonies. The Orthodox Church has never prohibited the use of the Bible by its members, but its traditions are a strong a barrier against the exercise of individual judgment. The differences between the Catholic and Orthodox churches, in addition to the authority of the pope and the Filioque clause, include a lack of acceptance of the immaculate conception of the Virgin Mary, proclaimed as doctrine by the Pope in 1854 and the practice of

allowing priests to marry. (Schaff, pages 256-257)

The Orthodox are Christians, with a great respect for Scripture and tradition, and are insulted when they are approached by Protestants as if they were not Christians. There are many basic doctrines which they share with conservative Protestants and Catholics, but there are others which are key to their distinctiveness. The mystical dimension of Christian faith is much stronger among the Orthodox than it is among Protestants. Orthodox faith is in many ways resistant to western ways of thinking and dialog, consequently little about our conventional evangelism is convincing to people from an Orthodox background. They also tend to be people who are very loyal to their cultural heritage and experience the Orthodox religion as an inseparable strand of that tradition.

There is no history of contact between Adventists and the Orthodox in North America. The neighborhoods where the largest share of Orthodox parishes are located, in the large cities of the northeast, also have relatively few Adventist churches. If there are a significant number of people from an Orthodox background in your community, this is largely "unplowed ground." Careful study of the specific culture and cautious, exploratory contacts are necessary to avoid blunders that will poison attitudes throughout the entire community from the very beginning.

Mormons—There are nearly 4.2 million adherents of the Church of Jesus Christ of Later-day 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 LDS church has done much to re-position its public image over the last three decades, spending millions of dollars on television spots, billboards and promotional materials. It has put behind it some of its most controversial practices from the 19th century. Mormons have become known as a family-oriented religion with an emphasis on wholesome entertainment and recreation, involving its young adults in a year or two of volunteer service, and exemplifying thrift, hard work, education and other middle class values. Despite this, they are not accepted as Christians because of their introduction of scriptures in addition to the Old and New Testaments and other unique doctrines.

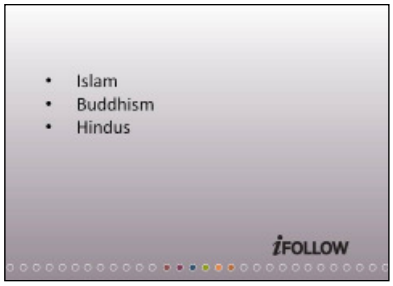
Some former LDS members have joined the Adventist Church over the years, and a few of them have written materials designed to help Adventists talk with Mormons. Douglas Pond, for many years an evangelist at the Voice of Prophecy, is one who came from a Mormon background and he has written *Pillars of Mormonism.*

Jehovah's Witnesses—There are about 1.3 million adherents to this religion in the U.S. and it has local branches in most counties. (Kosmin, Mayer and Keysar) Because they insist on a very separatist approach, they are often in conflict with society. During the 1930s and

1940s Jehovah's Witnesses fought many court cases to preserve their religious liberty. They have won a total of 43 cases before the Supreme Court. Jehovah's Witnesses share with Adventists a belief in the second coming of Christ, but they teach that Christ is a created being and do not believe in the Trinity. Their scenario for end-time events focuses on 144,000 individuals who will rule with Christ over "an unnumbered great crowd" who receive salvation in an earth cleansed of evil.

During the 1930s and through the 1960s the Jehovah's witnesses were believed to have a very high growth rate. It has become clear that the methods used for calculating this information were not reliable, and that there has been a significant decline in membership in recent years. (*Christianity Today*, April 17, 2000) A few Jehovah's Witnesses have joined the Adventist Church over the years, and some have written materials suggesting how to dialog with individuals in this group and those interested in its teachings.

Islam—The news media have reported in recent years 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. Islam is a religion deeply intertwined with the traditional culture of the Middle East and many Muslim believers in America are found in immigrant communities. There is also a significant number among African Americans, most of whom are mainstream Muslim believers, not Black Muslims.

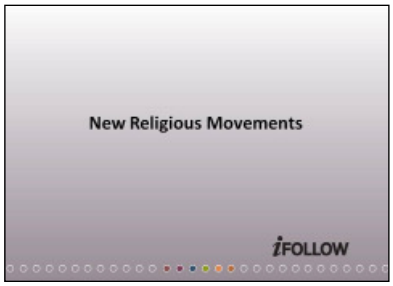


Progress has been made in recent years in building a bridge between Adventists and the Muslim world. Pilot projects are now beginning in the U.S. along the same lines. The Seventh-day Adventist Church in North America has appointed a consultant for Islamic affairs. A significant compendium of information has been published in *The Three Angels and the Crescent: Adventist Approaches to Islamic People.*

Buddhism—There are more than a million people in the U.S. who indicate that they identify with Buddhist religion. (Kosmin, Mayer and Keysar) The majority of these are likely in metropolitan areas where there are significant communities of immigrants from Asian nations where Buddhist faith has a long tradition. At the same time, efforts are being made to put a contemporary, American face on Buddhist philosophy, which, by its very nature, is easy to adapt and open to new expressions. This has resulted in significant numbers of native-born Americans raised with a Christian religious background who have become Buddhists. The only materials that Adventists authors have published on dialog with Buddhists is "Buddhism and Adventism: A Myanmar Initiative," chapter 26 in *Adventist Mission in the 21st Century.*

Hindus—There are about 766,000 Hindu believers in the U.S. (Kosmin, Mayer and Keysar) Almost all of these are found in a few major metropolitan areas where there is a South Asian community. The Hindu religion is one of the most traditional and culture-bound in the world, and has not made the transition to the modern American context. Nothing has

been published by Adventist authors about dialog with Hindus.



New Religious Movements—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. Where traditional cults have lived in pronounced separation from the rest of the community, more and more new religions are moving into the mainstream of popular culture. You may find them wanting to cooperate in community service activities. Dialog with new religions is increasingly important to the mission of the Adventist Church, but it is important to understand that you need the help of a highly skilled consultant or resource person.

What is Your Market Share?

A concept borrowed from the business world may help you better understand who you are reaching and how many people you are likely to reach with any particular outreach event or program. This concept is called "market share." In other words, if I were a Cadillac dealer, I would not expect to sell cars to anyone and everyone in town. And, if I sold my Cadillac dealership and bought a VW dealership, I would not expect to bring all my old customers along.

If you send out a mailing to every home in town, inviting people to a Revelation Seminar or a Heartbeat Community Coronary Risk Evaluation, you cannot expect to get everyone to come out. You cannot expect to get all kinds of people, either. There is a "market" for each of these events, and you will get the kind of people who are "in the market" for each type of event. Even among this target group, you are in competition with other providers who are offering similar events. How many of those who feel a need for this kind of event will actually respond to your ads and come to your event? This is your "market share" and there is a formula that can be used to provide a reasonable bench-mark for it.

The segment of the religious market most likely to respond to the conventional methods used in Adventist evangelism—public meetings, Revelation Seminars, satellite-linked evangelistic meetings—is the percentage in your county labeled as "conservative Protestant." That may be a small percentage of the population, and because there is a competi-

tion, your "market share" will be an even smaller percentage. These realities may explain the attendance at the public meetings held in your church over the years.

How can you reach out to other segments and increase the Adventist "market share" in your community? That question holds the key to missionary strategy for your church, although there are few proven methods and programs for this uncharted territory. It requires experimentation. If you are to break out of the narrow confines of the pool in which your church has always gone fishing, then you must be prepared to try one thing after another in the new pools until you begin to get results. This process need not be entirely random "shots in the dark." Information is available to you to help you set up each experiment, and you learn as you go. It is also true that the Holy Spirit provides guidance if we listen for that "still small voice."

Handouts in this Package

1. Religious Profile of the USA

2. Get Your Religious Profile on the Web

Additional Resources

Bacciocchi, Samuele (1977). *From Sabbath to Sunday.* Rome: Pontifical Gregorian University Press.

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Vandeman, George (1986). *What I Like About ...* Nampa, ID: Pacific Press.

Yearbook of American and Canadian Churches; National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA.

Discussion Questions

1. What does the religious profile of our community suggest about approaches to outreach and evangelism?

2. Can we identify specific individuals in our congregation who come from various religious backgrounds?

3. What recommendations would we make to future evangelists and our pastor based on this information?

Group Exercise

Purpose: To walk a few yards, at least, in the "other's" shoes, gaining an understanding of the religion of the people in our community.

Preparation: This activity will be far more useful if it is an actual outing, in which case preparations such as choosing destinations, timing, carpooling, etc., will need to be made. If the group does not have enough courage for an outing, other options require web or other research to create the necessary atmosphere.

Assignment: Option One (recommended): Go as a group to visit a worship service that is different from your own. This could range in discomfort zone from visiting another local conservative Protestant church to visiting a "high church" kind of church such as a Catholic or Episcopalian Mass, or even visiting a mosque, synagogue, Buddhist shrine, etc.

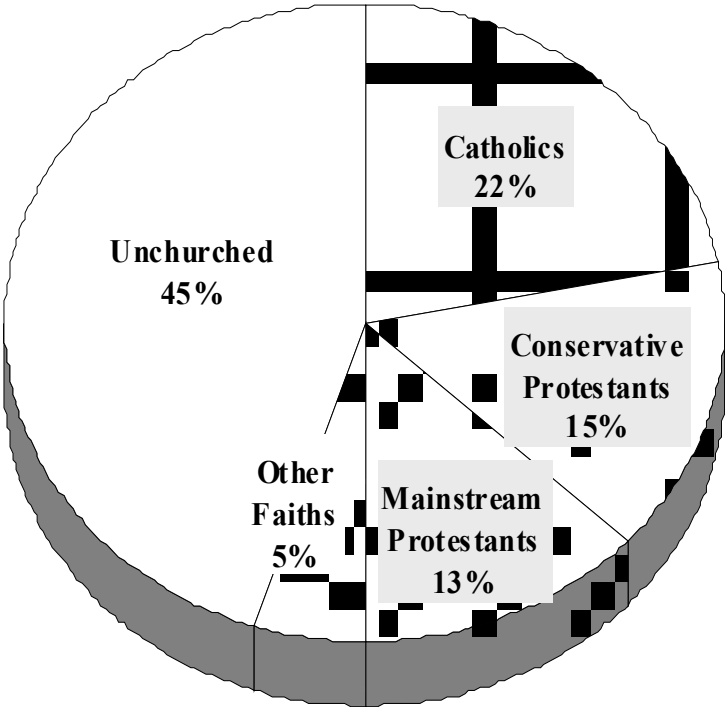
Option Two: Research the worship styles of one of the above and attempt to recreate the atmosphere in your meeting room. For instance, you could have attendees remove their shoes and/or cover heads at the door, sit cross-legged on the floor, sing or listen to music that is not what you are used to, etc.

Time: If you do Option Two, you need only a half hour or so. If you choose Option One, your timing will be dictated by others. Visit a whole service, and leave time for visiting afterwards.

Debrief: Allow time for serious discussion of emotions and reactions. Then discuss this one, extremely important, overarching question: **If we are uncomfortable in their world, how can we expect them to enter ours?** What did Jesus do? How can we stretch our boundaries? Are there dangers? What are they?

Handout 1

Religious Profile of the USA



Source: Religious Congregations and Membership Study

Handout 2

Get Your Religious Profile on the Web

The most recent data on religion in America is now available on line. If you have access to a computer with a web browser, you can find a religious profile for your county and download it or print it out.

1. Go to www.thearda.com

2. Click on "U.S. Congregational Membership" near the top of the page

3. Select "Reports"

4. Type in the Zip Code for your church and click on "Go"

This will take you to the county report for your county.

If you would like to get a religious profile for your metropolitan area or your state, those possibilities are included in the menu immediately above where you type in the Zip Code for your church.