

Discovering Your City

**Bringing Light to the Task of
Community Transformation**

*Includes an
Urban Analysis
Reference Appendix*

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Chapter 5: Gathering The Harvest Force Facts

It is said there are three prerequisites for a general to lead his forces to victory in a war. These are to know:

1. The enemy's strength, location, strategy, preparedness.
2. His own forces - their strength, location, tactics, preparedness.
3. The context of the land, the battlefield, its description and conditions.

In a spiritual war the same thing is true. Ephesians 6 makes it plain that we are already at war. To win the war, we need information about the enemy, our own forces, and the land in which the battle takes place. The battle is for the souls of men and women, the real "land" to be occupied.

We should never consider the unchurched the enemy. The one exercising fundamental control of them is the enemy. However, when we want to pin down the source of many of our problems, we can learn from that great philosopher, Pogo who declared in one tough skirmish, "We've met the enemy and he is us!" In one sense, this describes the Church today. We're often our own worst enemy. If and when the Body of Christ begins functioning near its potential, with spiritual and knowledge-based insight, we will find the world to be a much better place, and millions more will be released from the enemy's snare. We all need to become "worshippers" before we become "workers," lest our efforts result in wood, hay and stubble.

"Research of the right kind can help us know where we are, and what our trajectory is. If we can locate ourselves, we can orient ourselves so we are pointing toward our vision once again."

Bryan Myers¹
Perspectives

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In this chapter we will primarily be looking at data about the Harvest Force, or in the above terminology, Battle Force. In church growth parlance this is often referred to as "institutional" data, that is, God's institution on earth, the Church.

There are dynamic forces (spiritual, economic, social, cultural, political, ethnic, religious) already working in the city, and the Church is in the midst of them. The Church's task is to "make disciples;" to effectively communicate and demonstrate the love, care, joy, truth and power of Jesus Christ; to be penetrating salt and revealing light. Although the Church can be seen, its basic reality is unseen. We have a purpose statement defined in Luke 4:

"The Spirit of the Lord is on (us), because he has anointed (us) to preach good news to the poor. He has sent (us) to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." (Luke 4:18,19)

The Church, Christians, and Christianity already have a reputation in your city...with the city government officials, with the unchurched, and

among the churches themselves. Many factors impact the Church's reputation. The churches and parachurch groups are carrying forth many ministries that could and should impact the life and lives of the city for righteousness. Some are, some are not.

"We have met the enemy, and he is us."

Pogo

The effectiveness of these ministries is determined against criteria that may differ from group-to-group, from city segment to city segment, and even person-to-person.

On the negative side...

There are identifiable and noticeable elements of society missing from the Church, or only minimally represented. Some of these elements can be classified by age, some by occupation, some by race and ethnicity, some by religious background and heritage, some by economic level or status, and some by social distinctives and status. There are a vari-

ety of reasons for the lack of representation, some are external to the Church, some are internal. One of the reasons may be that over the past few years the Church has not been furnished and/or challenged with the right information in the right form at the right time in order for it to be aware of these missing segments. Another probable reason is the Church did not have in place a detection system for self or societal analysis. There are other reasons yet to be uncovered.

And on the positive side...

On the other hand, there are also some areas in some cities that have experienced, or are experiencing, a very positive transformation. This impact is related directly to one or more churches, and usually to one or more visionary and proactive leaders in the Church. In a few cities, transformation is occurring in areas where high crime rates, gangs, poverty and pornography previously have been rampant, but today are minimal. Where high school dropout rates were very high, and are now the lowest in a decade or more. The morality quotient has also raised noticeably.

“Evangelism is not complete without the gathering of new disciples into the dynamic fellowship of a local church. The missionary task is not merely to organize a church on foreign soil, but to initiate a Christ-ward movement which will propagate the gospel throughout the entire culture — and eventually other cultures as well.”

Steve Hawthorne, Ralph Winter,
*Perspectives on the World Christian
Movement*

The Heights, a section of about one hundred thousand population, in the center of Houston, is one such area. The mayor and other city officials have recognized the basic causes for the positive change were the local churches and parachurch groups in that area, and their demonstrated love and care for all ages. Over the years, Urban Outreach Inc. and other groups, have implemented care-giving programs for every age group, but mainly via the youth.

One of many such programs is the Youth Club begun in 1993. This grew out of meetings between Urban Outreach and the principal of

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Hoge Middle school. It focused on after school programs and activities. Behind the scenes, Urban Outreach spearheaded Harvest Field, including spiritual mapping, research of the area. The theory was, the more they knew about the history of the area, how the diverse cultures had been interacting, the type and cause of the crimes, the spiritual history, who were jobless and why, the number of single-parent families, the expressed physical and other felt needs of the families and youth, etc., the better they could design and implement programs and activities that would be effective over the long haul.

Now in the area there are fifty-two churches cooperating, many area businesses are involved, and the city has made the parks, swimming pools and other facilities available. Urban Outreach has helped organize volunteers for mentoring and tutoring the kids to help them in their studies, and for taking state tests (on one standard state test the Heights' percentage of improved scores is the best in the city). They teach leadership skills, help the youth find jobs, and maintain a "job bank." *They have a wide range of activities, e.g. sports, drama, camping, etc.* for involving the youth.

Urban Outreach says because many kids never get any attention, they feel abandoned and have no one they can trust. This usually manifests itself in any one of a variety of negative ways. One way they help build esteem is in mentoring and tutoring. They have two volunteers work with one student. The youth learn someone really cares. They take small groups of kids on special camping trips designed to provide a fun and and a loving, caring environment.

Urban Outreach has demonstrated community transformation can be more than a good idea, a vision, or a goal. In the Heights in Houston it is a reality. This is one of the best "shoe-leather love and theology" demonstrations we have seen or know of in the nation.

A wide variety...

Some churches are healthy, growing and reaching out to a broad spectrum of the city and various segments of society. There is a wide variety in the leadership styles of the churches, and the gifting of the leaders. There are many different churchly structures. Some churches

meet only in one structure. Some meet in a variety of structures at various times, and have a variety of service types and styles. Some are "cell churches," and some are churches with cells.

Some churches have strong evangelistic outreach programs, others are mostly nurture centers or hospitals. Some multiply churches, and some multiply members. Some are led by apostles, some by prophets, some by evangelists, and some are led by pastor-teachers. Some are large, some are small. Some are authentically Christian, some nominally so.

George Barna indicates from his research that *only 10-15% of churches are effective change agents today.*³ However, this can be an effective catalyst for city-reaching.

The Opposition

There is another matter we must consider that contributes significantly to the challenge of city-reaching. That is, we have an enemy that definitely does not want it to be accomplished.

Nehemiah wasn't long into his city and nation restoring enterprise before he came face to face with the enemy. The people in Jerusalem had no more than just declared, "Let us arise and build!" and started to work, when a trio of ridiculers from the surrounding area began to mock and accuse them of rebelling against the king. (2:17-20) Repeatedly from then on, Sanballat, Tobiah and Gershem tried to thwart the work of the Lord.

"We cannot simply save individuals in the city and expect that the city will get saved. If the Church does not deal with the systems and structures of evil in the city, then it will not effectively transform the lives of that city's individuals."

Robert Linthicum

Nehemiah was also beset by opposition from within. His own people confronted him with some weighty challenges (Chapter 5). The enemy's attack was both internal and external. In both situations, Nehemiah solved the problems in

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consort with the Lord by accurately identifying the source of the problems, and by standing firm with God for righteousness.

Like Nehemiah, there must be the constant awareness that "the battle is the Lord's." City-reaching is not easy. The Kingdom of Darkness is alive and well, and reclaiming the land will be a constant challenge...but the victory is promised. (2 Corinthians 2:14 "*Thanks be to God who always leads us in His triumph through Jesus Christ...*") The heart of the battle must be fought in the heavenlies, for "our struggle is not against flesh and blood" but against the rulers in the spiritual realm.

Our challenge is to be able to respond with a valid, "Yes!" with proof when anyone in the city asks, "Does anyone care about me?"

What is the Picture of the City Church?

A strategic element in carrying forth the initiative to thoroughly reach the city is to gain insights into the health, growth, dynamics, scope and effectiveness of the Church as a whole, and of the individual churches and parachurch groups. This information will be used to motivate, equip, catalyze and mobilize the Body of Christ for taking the whole Gospel to the whole city, and to be a more effective transformation agent. Enlightened research reveals where the Church is in relation to where and what Christ desires it to be, and provides the basis for future planning.

*"A well laid out plan is
halfway to success."*

Unknown

As previously mentioned, an initial picture will also, in a "prime the pump" fashion, provide the visionary leaders and catalyzers with a basic picture to use in helping to launch the initiative. This could and should ultimately and verifiably impact for righteousness every element of the Body, and every segment of the city's heterogeneous mosaic.

Painting the picture of the Church in the city will involve both *library* and *field* research. An initial picture can be fabricated relying mainly on *library* research. This picture can be painted with fairly limited resources of personnel, time and finances. The information needed for

providing insights into why conditions are the way they are, and for guiding and underwriting effective methodologies and transformation will require various kinds of *field* research, and--will be ongoing.

Crucial Questions Needing Answers

Before we look at an outline of the various data categories let's consider six categories of questions relating to the Harvest Force to keep in mind when doing the data gathering, processing and analyzing. It is not intended to be complete, but a representative listing. These categories were selected for highlighting because it is in these areas that many of the commonly known ills are impacting the Church today. Use it as a check list to see how you are doing in the process.

You will be embarking on extremely serious and important business. The end result of your research and analysis can be pivotal in your city's current and future history. Few cities or nations have been in a position to witness what the Lord can and will do when His Body is functioning symbiotically and proactively around commonly held vision, goals and information.

When you are gathering, processing and analyzing the data, obtain answers to the following Harvest Force related questions:

1. Prayer Evaluation

- * Is there a united prayer effort organized in the city?
- * Do the leaders pray together on a consistent basis?
- * Is there consistent and strategic prayer walking?
- * Is there consistent and persistent intercession for the city, its peoples, and government?
- * Has contact been established with city officials (mayor, Chief of Police, etc.) for the purpose of prayer?
- * Have prayer lighthouses (or neighborhood houses of prayer) been established? If they have, what is the city coverage?
- * Have pastors attended prayer summits? What percent?

2. Vision and Goals

- * Have the leaders cast a clear and concise vision? What is the

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vision?

- * Is the vision an overarching vision encompassing the whole Church and the whole city?
- * Are there measurable goals owned by a large spectrum of the Church, that when achieved will attain to the vision?
- * Where vision exists, is it a closure vision? Or is it limited to an activity or growth vision?
- * Is there a citywide initiative in place already? Who is involved? What is its known purpose? What is the current status?

3. Equipping the Saints

- * Is there adequate understanding and administration of the 5-fold ministries (Ephesians 4:11) in equipping the saints? For old and new churches? What percentage of the churches?
- * Is the leadership pushing balanced equipping (pastors, elders)?
- * Is there instruction on spiritual gifts? How widespread?
- * Is there involvement in training (doing it) in evangelism, small group leadership (nurture and evangelism), etc.
- * To what extent is missions being emphasized?
- * Identify some of the key apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers in the city.

4. Body Life

- * To what extent is there inter-church, inter-denominational, inter-organizational cooperation and fellowship?
- * Is there a presence of a functioning *overall citywide strategy initiative with commonly held vision and goals*? (Don't confuse this with processes and tactical ministries such as crusades, Promise Keepers, etc. and their goals and strategies.)
- * Where is reconciliation taking place within the Body?
- * Where is reconciliation needed?

5. Relevancy of Gospel Communication

- * What generations are the Church effectively reaching? By what measurement? What are the salient factors?
- * Are there widespread ministries for reaching singles of various ages and backgrounds? Can you give illustrations?
- * Is the Church ministering effectively to single moms? Business

people? Senior citizens? Minorities? Politicians?

- * Which ethnic/ethnolinguistic target groups are being reached? Not being reached? How? Why?

6. Outreach Ministry

- * Are holistic "mission outposts" established throughout the city? Where can more be located? What should be their primary ministries focus?
- * Which churches have benevolent outreach ministries beyond their internal family? Are these doing effective evangelization through meeting physical, emotional and social needs?
- * What is the ratio of evangelistic (outreach) cells per church for the Church in the city? For the fastest growing churches? For the reproducing churches?
- * Are social, economic, moral, psychological and political transformations taking place? Where? What are some examples? What factors are involved?

Note: You have probably thought of other crucial questions relating to the description and status of the Church. List these and keep them handy along with those above.

Needed Harvest Force Data

Let us now look at the data categories applicable to denominations, local churches and parachurch groups. *Not every one of the following data items applies to all three categories, however.* The categories below can be confusing, as it looks like (and there is) duplication between the sections. Your basic task is to identify the Harvest Force and the dynamics of this Harvest Force. The Church in the city, as the Body of Christ, is your primary target of analysis.

Most of this information can (and should) be made available to all the churches, which helps in overall Body understanding and acceptance, and also may end up getting some errors corrected.

It may be difficult to get some of the information. Some individual churches and denominations are often quite protective of their internal status, ways and means. Yet you need to find ways of obtaining the

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data, since only by doing this can you get the true picture of the Church in the city. You may want to use linked tables to keep public information and proprietary information separate, yet in the same database. This provides you with flexibility in data management and selection, and will build up trust with the donors.

"Read Me!!"

The Expanded Harvest Force Data Descriptions are located in Appendices-F & F-1 which are corollary with this chapter and section. These appendices cover all the detailed data listings for the following categories. F-1 provides a "phased" listing. Also, Appendix-H provides further treatment of the data.

Data Category Outline

I. Basic Administration and Ministry Descriptions

- A. Basic identity
- B. Goals and programs
- C. Ministries description
 - 1) Evangelism
 - 2) Missions
 - 3) Benevolence
 - 4) Community development
 - 5) Media
 - 6) Education and training
- D. Target peoples
- E. Target areas
- F. Stance on socio-cultural issues

II. Churches and Related Statistical Data

- A. Churches (English speaking)
- B. Churches (non-English speaking)

- C. Small Groups (by age and purpose)
- D. Average weekly attendance (worship or main service(s))
- E. Active baptized members
- F. Baptisms - "believer's" and infant
- G. Pastors and/or staff
- H. Intercessory prayer cells

III. Other Harvest Force Data

- A. Local churches - information not included above - unique to local churches.
 - 1. Predominant ethnic orientation
 - 2. Seating capacity
 - 3. Number and types of services
 - 4. Weekly meetings/services
- B. Parachurch groups
 - 1. Organizational affiliations
 - 2. Index of non-profits
- C. Other corporate Church data
 - 1. Identification of special efforts and groups
 - 2. Identification of key Christians in special posts

Data Sources

Usually there is not very much local church, or Christian organization data available via public sources, at least not up-to-date data. However, there are some good exceptions. It very well may be that your city already has a directory of churches, ministries, denominations, and/or parachurch organizations. (Remember, everyone who is genuinely "born again" is part of the Harvest Force. However, all Protestant churches should be included as a minimum in your directory without trying to make judgments as to their biblical stance. A directory that includes all churches and worship centers for every religion (even cults) can be a valuable asset.)

1. Denominational Headquarters Data

Perhaps there is a denominational or church association office in your city or area. They usually maintain annual reports

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on all of the churches under their jurisdiction. They may also have some graphical analysis, or even maps showing the distribution of their churches and ministries.

In any event, contact the denominational office (which in some situations may be combined with a local church) for each denomination, and explain why the data is needed and how it will be used. In cities where there are too few churches of one denomination to have a separate office, often one of the church's pastors is the local "superintendent."

Many denominations also have state or regional associations that maintain records for all of their affiliated churches, and these should be contacted if the information is not available locally.

Some groups of churches, or affiliations, claim they are not a denomination, but have centrally kept records.

In addition to statistical data, obtain information (reports, articles, etc.) relating to the various ministries and programs the denomination is currently involved in, or sponsors. If there are some success stories that have been published, it will be wise to accumulate a sampling of these which may help in the analysis, and provide case studies.

2. Local Church Data.

The local church data is normally obtained through a local church survey of the city, or region of the city. However, some information may already be compiled (such as a listing of churches) by any one of several different groups in the city, whether Christian or other. With the current level of information technology, many information banks are finding their way to the Internet and various Web sites. Some churches have their own Web sites.

In Chapter 3 we discussed several different survey methods and techniques. Additionally, some local church-related sample survey forms have been included in Appendix-D which you

may find helpful in surveying local churches.

As previously mentioned, sooner or later a good *church directory* will need to be compiled. This information changes often, including pastors and phone numbers, and not quite so often, locations. If you are just starting the process, you will probably find the Yellow Pages helpful. However, these will not be complete, nor necessarily up-to-date. Although this may suffice for some "initial assessment" picture, and could be used in the "prime-the-pump" situation for motivation or recruiting involvement in a citywide initiative, it will not support needed church growth analysis.

Check with local associations of evangelicals, ecumenical councils, and youth organizations. Also remember that every non-profit organization registers with the state. The state corporation office (or library, using electronic access) may be able to furnish you with a church list. You may be able to get this in electronic form, then edit out those you wish to omit.

Often, some parachurch group has already compiled a directory of churches. Check with the local ecumenical council, Youth for Christ, evangelical and/or pastors' associations, etc.. Check the Internet and the Web. Today there are more and more databases becoming available that track annually the telephone numbers and addresses of all businesses and churches. Contact Mapping Center for Evangelism⁴ or Strategic Resources Ministry⁵ for more information and leads on these databases.

Contact the city offices, including the planning office, and see if they keep a record of churches and other Christian organizations. Some cities do.

3. Parachurch Organizations Data

Most parachurch groups present in the city will have an office. Since there can be a wide variety of Christian organizations that come under the parachurch label, it may well be there is not a

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comprehensive directory available. A helpful directory would include Christian schools, seminaries, Bible schools, clinics, benevolence, campus ministries, sending agencies, literature, evangelism, Christian media [radio, television, films, recordings], arts and entertainment, consulting firms, research groups, etc..

Check with the local evangelical or ministerial association to see if a recent directory already exists. Over time contact will probably need to be made with representatives of every parachurch group to determine the extent of overall ministry the Church has in the city.

In addition, there may be some sending agencies in your city. Also contact the Rescue Missions. Some parachurch groups are involved in coordinating or catalyzing citywide ministries of evangelism, training, etc..

Notes:

1. Keep in mind the object of the research, which is to determine the identity, location, description and status of the Harvest Force in the city/area. Also keep in mind, you don't need to gather everything you could gather. That is, you need to surmise what data is needed and not needed and when. Therefore, you must keep in mind the goals and what you plan on doing with the data and analysis.
2. Just remember to ask yourself "Why do we need this?" It takes time, effort, space and finances to obtain, maintain, analyze and publish information. Know what you need and how it will be used. Also remember you want to generate a clear picture of what yet needs to be done, and be able to communicate this information to the leaders and the Body.

Help the Future

When you are spying out the land, you will find there is quite a disparity among organizations and churches with regards to what information is gathered and maintained. One of your challenges will be to help rectify

this through demonstrating how and why the data is needed. It is an education process. The best way to do this is to tell stories of how the data you already have is being used to reach the city. Don't get discouraged at the start. As the research process evolves, you will gain more stories. Tell people they will be able to see the aggregate of all the data and analysis at some point in time (such as a conference, publication, congress, etc.) This assures them there is a definite Church-wide purpose in what you are doing. Only at that time will they really begin to accurately understand why and how the data is valuable...even powerful.

The involvement of leadership is essential in both the maintenance and collection of the data. One of their roles is to convince denominations and churches of the need to maintain needed data (e.g. *attendance, small groups, prayer cells, etc.*). And another is to explain why the data is needed, and to encourage them to cooperate in furnishing it promptly when it is needed. Unless the Church has the information needed for insightful evaluation of Body life, effectiveness in ministry, and overall progress, the Church can drift undetected from its purposes and goals.

In your investigation and survey, always pursue the information you know will give you the best understanding of the situation. Reflect this on your forms and in your reports, whether or not the data is available. You are involved in a process that includes education, enlightenment and seed-sowing.

The Next Chapter

In the next chapter we'll look at gathering the Harvest Field facts needed for providing an accurate, up-to-date picture of status and dynamics of the city. When you couple the picture of the Harvest Field with that described in this chapter for the Harvest Force, you will have the foundational data needed for objectively analyzing what God has been doing, and what He wants to do in the not-too-distant future in the city. This *prophetic message* could and should lead the Church in the city into new and fruitful efforts for "discipling" and transforming the city.

Endnotes:

1. Myers, Bryant. *Perspectives*. Monrovia, CA: MARC Newsletter, September 1997
2. *Urban Outreach Inc.* is headquartered in the Heights section of Houston, TX. It was founded in 1993 by Duncan Ragsdale, who still serves as Director. Their programs are designed for the purpose of "bringing together clergy, laity, school children and their parents." You can reach them at: 205 E. Ninth Street, or P.O. Box 70129, Houston, TX 77270-0129, Ph: 713-869-4281. Ministries of Urban Outreach include: Love Your Neighborhood, Heights Youth Rescue, Heights Outreach, Heights Youth Club, HYC Drama, HYC Fine Arts Academy, HYC Leadership Sports, HYC Camps and Clinics, Donna's Kid-Mentoring, Heights Outreach Pastors Fellowship, Heights Leadership Institute, Heights Town Planning, and Lighthouses for Houston Neighbors.
3. Barna, George *What Effective Churches Have Discovered: Insights on Ministry in the Late Nineties*. A Christian Growth Seminar by George Barna, Copyright, 1997 George Barna, Barna Research Group, 2487 Ivory Way, Oxnard, CA 993030
4. *Mapping Center for Evangelism*: www.map4jesus.org
5. Strategic Resources Ministry: www.lia-pdx.org/rcs/srmhome.htm.