



## DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR DEMOGRAPHIC STUDY

Why should a church be interested in demographics? Isn't it a secular marketing concept best reserved for businesses and those trying to make money? The word *demographics* itself simply means "writings about people." It is the research on and study of groups of people in society on either a large or small scale.

The biblical rationale for demographics is found in John 4:35 when Jesus said, "Don't you say, 'There are still four more months, then comes the harvest'? Listen [to what] I'm telling you: *Open your eyes and look at the fields*, for they are ready for harvest." Demographic studies can be an eye-opener for some churches and help them begin to see through kingdom eyes the communities in which God has planted them.

After providing a printed summary of the report, presenting it verbally, and explaining the information in it; use the following questions to lead a discussion:

1. What surprised you in this report?
2. What did not surprise you in this report?
3. Does our church reflect the people who live within our primary ministry area?
4. For example, how do the percentages of age compare to our church? In other words, if our community is made up of 8% who are 10-14 years of age, shouldn't that be reflective of our church as well? What does it say about us if it is less? What does it say about us if it is more?
5. What does the population change map have to say about our growth rate as a church?
6. Some people say, "Birds of a feather flock together." Would you say that the U.S. Mosaic profile of our community is reflective of our church? If it isn't, what can we do about that? If it is but we're not growing as fast as the population rate, what does that tell us?
7. What does the population breakdown according to families and non-families have to say about our strategy as a church?
8. The North American Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention asserts that 70% of the U.S. population is lost and does not know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. How many people does that represent in our community? What is your response to that?



## IDEAS FOR SERMON ON DEMOGRAPHICS USING ACTS 10:1 – 11:18

### CHANGING THE SCORECARD

Where are we going church? If we don't know where we are going or why we exist, some things happen to fill the void. Here are some responses from different perspectives:

- The status quo folks – Let's keep doing what we have been doing.
- The deconstructionists – These are leaders who are obsessed with what they will not do anymore. They are often angry folks who do not like the status quo folks so they want to throw out tradition and do everything differently.
- The methodologists – These folks are captured by the latest and greatest tool or method that promises to deliver new ministry and more results.
- The doctrinal purists – They embrace a certain doctrinal purity that they believe sets them apart from those just mentioned.

But there are better ways to carry on ministry in an ever changing culture and context. Luke's account in Acts 10-11 give us some principles that I want to lift up for our examination and consideration.

In the flow of the book of Acts, Peter has seen the early church launched, preached the first sermon where 3000 came to Christ, seen the lame walk, and been released from prison by an angel. Yet he did not see or understand what Christ wanted to do with his life and the life of the church. He believed that Christ had come for the Jews and that the gospel was for the Jews. He was right that the Gospel was and is for the Jews, but it is also for all peoples everywhere. Christ had made that clear on Acts 1:8 – the mission is *from everywhere to everyone*. But something dramatic had to happen for Peter to get it. He did not get that the gospel was for people not like him. Yet, really, neither do we. What happened to Peter needs to happen to us if we are to understand why we are here and what we are to be doing. What God did was change the scorecard for Peter.

#### Listen to the Story of the Encounter.

God spoke to Cornelius, a Gentile who had been praying. His prayers had been heard. Does God hear the prayers of those who seek Him? Yes, and He not only heard the prayers, He answered in dramatic fashion. At the same time as the servants were on their way to find Peter, he was on the rooftop of Simon the tanner praying. God spoke to him in a dramatic vision. Peter went with the servants to the house of Cornelius. When Cornelius shared his vision, notice the response of Peter: "God does not show favoritism." Think on that for a moment. Does God has favorites in your community? Are there people that God would say are unclean and unfit for salvation? Once Peter got the message of no favorites, he shared it with the Jewish leaders. The key phrase is in 11:18 – "even the Gentiles."



Who are the “even these” in your life and in the life of this church? Our eyes need to be opened by God to who is around us. Our minds need to be changed by God to understand new ways of doing ministry. God will change the way we keep score and the way we measure success.

### Open Our Eyes Lord.

If you opened your eyes in the year this church was founded, you would have seen a strong working class neighborhood populated by folks who knew about church and were open to the ministry of the church. [Adapt this to fit your church’s beginning.] However, to open our eyes today to the community in which this church is called to minister is to see a vastly different population. [Read from the church’s Site Express Report]

This means that the way you do ministry today has to be different than the way you did ministry even 10 years ago. And it will need to continue changing as the world and community around you changes. Once our eyes are opened to those around us, we have to get the people who are in our community on our hearts. Then we will open our hands to help.

However, it all begins with a personal encounter with the living Christ. What would God have you do? What would God have me do? Consider these actions:

1. Pray that God will open our eyes and hearts to the ministry He has for us – from everywhere to everyone – beginning right here and going to the ends of the earth.
2. Begin to see the “even these” through the eyes of Jesus.
3. Begin to do ministry to reach the “even these.”
4. Change the score card in order to do discipleship – to make disciples.

Here are some examples of ways we can do that:

- Create an environment of community and family.
- Build one-on-one disciple making relationships.
- Provide space for the messy and difficult people.
- Have systems and processes that foster disciple making through life-on-life change.
- Create a culture of inviting where people are constantly inviting others to get connected to the church and then be sent out in meaningful ministries.
- Continue to be a praying church. When we bow before God, He works in and through us.
- When we pray, God changes us.
- Sunday School teachers, deacons, and leaders, pray for people by name.
- Engage the community around you through prayer.
- Ask God to open your eyes.
- If you don’t see it before you see it, you will never see it.



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