

Georgia State University

ScholarWorks @ Georgia State University

Anthropology Theses

Department of Anthropology

8-8-2005

Geographic Analysis of Two Suburban Mega Church Congregations in Atlanta: A Distance and Demographic Study

Ulrike Krampe Ingram

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.gsu.edu/anthro_theses



Part of the [Anthropology Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Ingram, Ulrike Krampe, "Geographic Analysis of Two Suburban Mega Church Congregations in Atlanta: A Distance and Demographic Study." Thesis, Georgia State University, 2005.

doi: <https://doi.org/10.57709/1059154>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Department of Anthropology at ScholarWorks @ Georgia State University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Anthropology Theses by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks @ Georgia State University. For more information, please contact scholarworks@gsu.edu.

GEOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS OF TWO SUBURBAN MEGA CHURCH CONGREGATIONS IN ATLANTA: A DISTANCE AND DEMOGRAPHIC STUDY

by

Ulrike Ingram

Under the Direction of Susan Walcott

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the spatial distribution of church members of two suburban mega churches in Atlanta. The research question concerns why people are choosing to drive thirty minutes or more to attend a mega church. A cost-benefit analysis weighs the costs of going to a distant church against the benefits of attending those churches. Examination focuses on the worship style, as well as the sense of community imparted by the two churches. The author also examines demographic factors such as gender, age, marital status, and socio-economic factors such as race, education, and occupation. The findings of the analysis demonstrate that the two mega churches are successful in providing the sense of community that suburban residents seek by offering an active small group environment.

INDEX WORDS: Atlanta, Mega Churches, First Baptist Church of Woodstock, North Point Community Church

GEOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS OF TWO SUBURBAN MEGA CHURCH CONGREGATIONS
IN ATLANTA: A DISTANCE AND DEMOGRAPHIC STUDY

by

ULRIKE INGRAM

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts
Georgia State University

2005

by

ULRIKE INGRAM

Major Professor: Susan Walcott

Committee: Truman Hartshorn

Elaine Hallisey

Electronic Version Approved:

Office of Graduate Studies
College of Arts and Sciences
Georgia State University
August 2005

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author wishes to acknowledge the following people for their support throughout this endeavor: Dr. Susan Walcott, for providing guidance and input, and for editing and proofing the manuscript; Dr. Truman Hartshorn and Elaine Hallisey for providing additional comments and feedback; First Baptist Church of Woodstock and North Point Community Church for allowing me to use their data; Southeastern Reprographics, Inc. for their financial support; Carla Waldron for listening; Brian Brooks for proof reading; and my mother Gudrun, my brother Andreas, and foremost my husband Chris, for supporting me patiently throughout this task.

I also want to thank God for triggering this research, and my father for instilling the importance of education in me.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iv
LIST OF TABLES	vii
LIST OF FIGURES	viii
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	x
Chapter 1 - Introduction.....	1
1.1. Purpose.....	1
1.2. Mega Churches	2
1.3. Churches Under Study	3
Chapter 2 - Literature Review.....	11
2.1. Geography of Religion.....	11
2.2. Economics of Religion.....	17
2.3. Sociology of Religion	20
Chapter 3 - Data and Methodology.....	24
3.1. Church Membership Data	24
3.2. Road Data for Geocoding Purposes.....	27
3.3. Claritas and Tiger Data for Demographic Analysis.....	27
3.4. Geocoding Method.....	28
3.5. Distance Analysis.....	30
3.6. Demographic Analysis.....	31
3.7. Definition of Study Area.....	32
Chapter 4: Analysis and Application	34
4.1. Introduction.....	34

4.2.	Distance Analysis.....	45
4.3.	Demographic Analysis.....	57
4.4.	Factors for choosing a specific church.....	77
Chapter 5 – Conclusion.....		92
REFERENCES		98

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Characteristics of Mega Churches and Mega Church Congregants.....	38
Table 2: Comparison of FBCW and NPCC.....	79
Table 3: Beliefs, Doctrines and Creeds of FBCW and NPCC (FBCW 2005c; NPCC 2005e).....	81
Table 4: Recommended Enrollment Ceilings in Sunday School Classes.....	84

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Basemap of First Baptist Church of Woodstock and North Point Community Church..	4
Figure 2: FBCW Sanctuary – From the Outside.....	5
Figure 3: FBCW Sanctuary – From the Inside	5
Figure 4: Dr. Johnny Hunt, Senior Pastor of FBCW	6
Figure 5: NPCC Main Campus – From the Outside	7
Figure 6: Buckhead Campus – From the Outside	8
Figure 7: Andy Stanley, Senior Pastor of NPCC.....	9
Figure 8: Geocoding Results for FBCW and NPCC Address Data.....	30
Figure 9: Core Impact Areas of FBCW and NPCC.....	33
Figure 10: Largest Participating Religious Group in 2000 (Glenmary Research Center).....	35
Figure 11: County Class for Georgia Counties (Georgia Facts and Figures).....	36
Figure 12: Number of Mega Church Attenders By State – Normalized by Population	37
Figure 13: U.S. Population Historical Church Membership.....	39
Figure 14: Church Members of Major Religious Groups in Georgia Including Mega Churches	40
Figure 15: FBCW Membership Increase	42
Figure 16: NPCC Attendance Increase	43
Figure 17: Population Growth in the Core Impact Areas	44
Figure 18: Distance Traveled to FBCW and NPCC	47
Figure 19: Median and Average Distance Traveled to FBCW and NPCC.....	47
Figure 20: Desire Lines to FBCW	48
Figure 21: Desire Lines to NPCC	49
Figure 22: Average Travel Time to Work in Core Impact Areas	51

Figure 23: Average Number of Vehicles per Housing Unit in Core Impact Areas	52
Figure 24: Thiessen Polygon Map of the Core Impact Areas	54
Figure 25: Thiessen Polygon Areas for the Core Impact Areas and Georgia.....	54
Figure 26: Distance Traveled to Church In Sands and Smock Study	55
Figure 27: Distance Traveled to Paradigm Churches	56
Figure 28: Distance Traveled to Church By Catholic Volunteer Leaders	57
Figure 29: FBCW and NPCC Membership By Age	59
Figure 30: Age For FBCW and General Population.....	63
Figure 31: Age for NPCC and General Population	63
Figure 32: Gender for FBCW and General Population	65
Figure 33: Marital Status of FBCW and General Population	67
Figure 34: FBCW Membership By Gender and Marital Status.....	68
Figure 35: General Population By Gender and Marital Status	69
Figure 36: FBCW and NPCC Household Composition	70
Figure 37: Household Composition of FBCW and General Population.....	71
Figure 38: Income of General Population.....	73
Figure 39: Education of Core Impact Areas, Georgia and U.S.	74
Figure 40: Occupation Type in Core Impact Areas	75
Figure 41: Racial Composition of Core Impact Areas, Georgia and U.S.....	76
Figure 42: Hispanic Population Percentage of Core Impact Areas, Georgia and U.S.....	77
Figure 43: Factors in Choosing a Church (American Religion Data Archive 2003).....	78

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

FBCW: First Baptist Church of Woodstock

NPCC: North Point Community Church

SBC: Southern Baptist Convention

Chapter 1 - Introduction

1.1. Purpose

The purpose of this thesis is to research the spatial distribution of church members and attenders of two suburban mega churches in Atlanta, as well as their demographic characteristics. The factors under study will include distance traveled between the member's residence and the church; demographic factors such as age, gender and marital status of members; external factors such as population growth and migration to the South, as well as the significance of the Southern United States as a distinct religious region; and church specific factors such as the role of the senior pastor and the various programs and worship elements offered by the church. Some of the questions that triggered this research are: are mega churches located in areas with exceptionally high numbers of church goers? How far is the drawing power of these mega churches? Why are people willing to drive a long distance to attend church, rather than attending a local neighborhood church? What are the churches doing to attract their congregations from so far? Is it the quality of preaching, the variety of programming, or the social networking opportunities? In addition to the distance study, the author will test several hypotheses related to the demographic factors, such as gender, age, marital status, and the number of children in the household, as well as socio-economic factors, such as race, education and occupation.

This paper will not discuss the frequency of attendance, or the commitment level of the members. It will also not address the validity of religious faith or the accuracy of religious choices. It will be a spatial and demographic analysis of the congregants of the two churches under study.

1.2. Mega Churches

The widely accepted definition of a mega church is “any congregation with a consistent weekly worship attendance of 2,000 or more persons” (Thumma 1996, 201). Mega churches in the United States are a fairly recent phenomenon. They emerged in the 1950s, but they started spreading more rapidly in the late 1980s (Liu 2003). Today, there are more than 850 mega churches in this country, some of which were founded a long time ago, but have only experienced rapid growth over the last fifty years, and some of which were founded in the last ten years. Georgia has the fourth highest number of mega churches, only behind California, Texas and Florida. Although mega churches first emerged in California, they then spread to the Southern states. The South has a higher level of religiosity than other regions of the United States. The dominance of the Baptist denomination and the emphasis on evangelism by the Baptist denomination contribute to the distinction of the South as the most religious region in the U.S. There are now even a few mega churches in the Midwest and Northeast. An even more recent development is the concept of the giga church, defined as a church with more than 10,000 regular weekly attenders (Broadway 2004).

Mega churches are mostly part of or affiliated with protestant denominations. However, a significant percentage of mega churches are independent, non-denominational churches. A high percentage of mega churches are located in suburbs around large cities. It is generally believed that part of the mega church growth is caused by the high rates of population growth in those suburban counties. However, this research will show that although the population growth is a contributing factor, it does not account for the full extent of the mega church growth. There are many churches in these suburban locations, which are not experiencing any growth or even have

a declining membership. Many mega church members and attenders are young middle classes families with two children, which is the same demographic group that lives in suburbs.

Although mega churches are experiencing popularity with their members and attenders, there are many critics of the mega church trend. Criticism focuses around the consumerism, super-sized Wal-mart mentality, the one-size-fits-all faith, the “disneyfication of religion” (Aycock 2003, 1), and the effects on the surrounding communities, such as traffic patterns and parking, and loss in tax revenue to the local government. Just like Wal-mart pushes small mom-and-pop stores out of business (Brown 2005), mega churches could close the doors of small churches. Some researchers believe that although mega churches attract many visitors, that they do not turn into committed Christians. Going to a mega church becomes a social event, rather than a spiritual one (Kaczorowski 1997). Concerning the large buildings and the potential downsizing mega churches may face in the future, “Thomas Long, an Emory University preaching professor, once said that megachurches will one day resemble ‘abandoned Kmart’s’ ” (Blake 2004).

1.3. Churches Under Study

The data used in this paper is based on the church databases of two suburban mega churches north of Atlanta. First Baptist Church of Woodstock (FBCW) is an example of a long established Baptist mega church in Cherokee county. North Point Community Church (NPCC) is an example of a much younger, non-denominational church in North Fulton county. Both of these churches are mega churches, since they are churches with more than 2,000 regular weekly attenders.

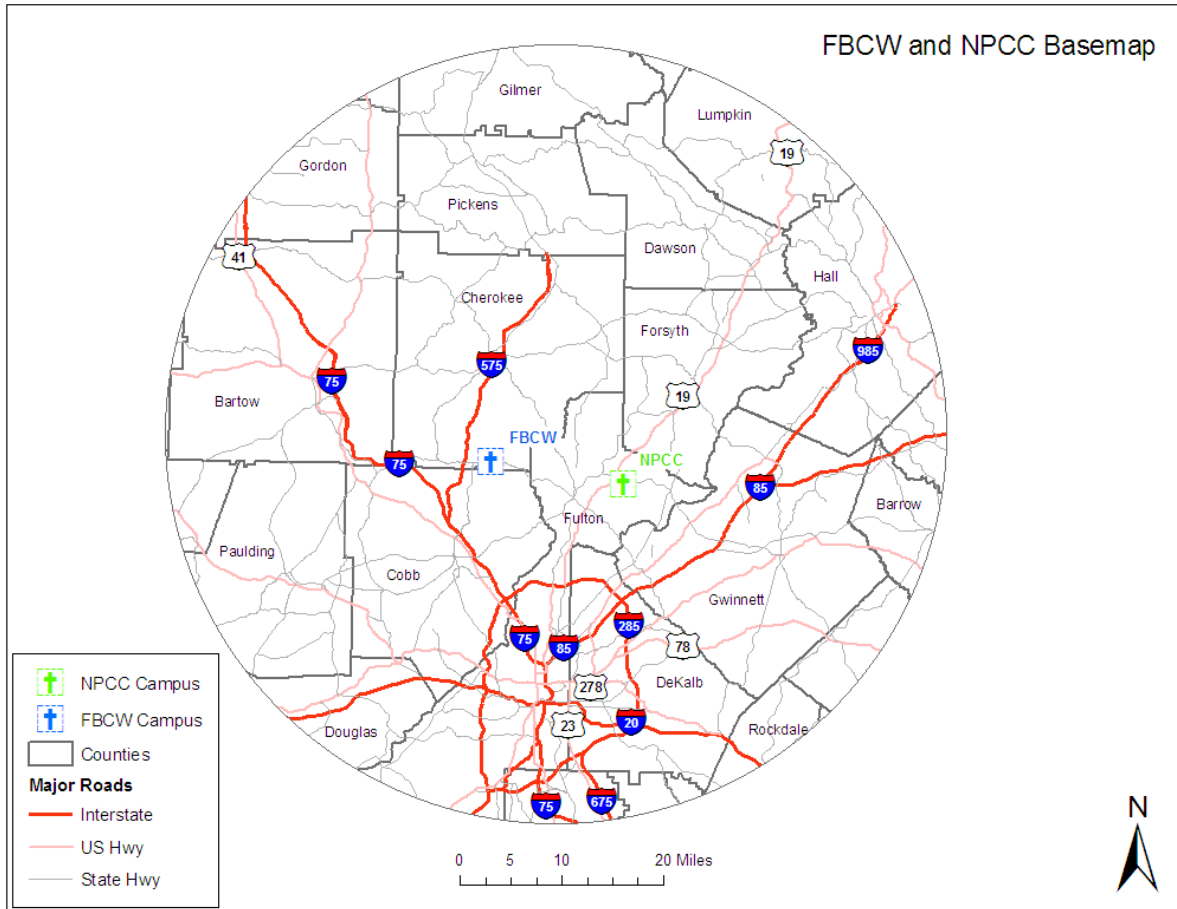


Figure 1: Basemap of First Baptist Church of Woodstock and North Point Community Church

1.3.1. First Baptist Church of Woodstock

The precursor to FBCW was founded in October 1837 by 12 families in Canton, GA. The church was first called “Enon Church”, but was later renamed to “Woodstock Church” after the city of Woodstock was incorporated. The church moved several times before choosing the current site off Highway 92 in Woodstock, GA. FBCW recently finished construction of a new worship center, which can seat up to 7,500 people.



Figure 2: FBCW Sanctuary – From the Outside

FBCW currently holds one worship service on Sunday mornings. FBCW has an average attendance count of more than 6,000 adults for the Sunday morning service. FBCW also has a Sunday evening service, and a Wednesday evening service. FBCW offers a large variety of activities 7 days a week, including Sunday School, visitation, choir practice, and athletic programs (First Baptist Church of Woodstock Website 2005b).



Figure 3: FBCW Sanctuary – From the Inside

FBCW's senior pastor is Dr. Johnny Hunt. He has been the senior pastor since 1986, and has been instrumental in the growth that FBCW has experienced in the last 15 years. Johnny Hunt wears a suit on Sunday mornings. There are several mottos that are used at FBCW: "Whatever it takes", "A shelter of hope just for you" and "To win and disciple fully devoted followers of Christ" (First Baptist Church of Woodstock Website 2005b). FBCW is very visible in the community, opening its facilities to civic meetings, sports banquets, and high school graduations. FBCW's building has a large cross on the top, and there is a tower with a cross at the street.



Figure 4: Dr. Johnny Hunt, Senior Pastor of FBCW

1.3.2. North Point Community Church

NPCC was founded in 1995. The founding families met in rented facilities for three years in the Cumberland area before purchasing land in Alpharetta, GA. NPCC now owns a building in Alpharetta that can seat 5,000 worshippers at a time. NPCC currently holds three worship services on Sunday mornings, and has an average attendance of 12,000 adults on a given Sunday, which qualifies it as a giga church, not only a mega church. NPCC's building looks more like a warehouse or a mall, than a church. There are no religious symbols, inside or outside the

building. NPCC was ranked fourth of the fastest growing U.S. churches of the 21st century by Outreach Magazine in 2004 (Easum 2004).



Figure 5: NPCC Main Campus – From the Outside

NPCC has a second campus in Buckhead, which currently has an average of 4,000 adults for Sunday worship, which by itself is also a mega church. The Buckhead campus has five Sunday services, three in the morning, and two in the evening, since the building only holds about 900 people. The Buckhead church is located in a remodeled grocery store. Attendees at Buckhead jokingly say “I attend a video church in a grocery store.” There are significant seating capacity, parking and traffic congestion issues at the Buckhead campus. There are only 200 parking spots, so they run several shuttle buses to and from seven remote parking lots in the area. Buckhead church, as part of North Point Ministries, has purchased land in Buckhead, and is planning to open a permanent facility in 2006.



Figure 6: Buckhead Campus – From the Outside

NPCC has purchased land in Cumming, GA and is planning to open a third campus in the fall of 2005. This multi-campus strategy makes use of advanced audio-visual technology, including a video presentation of the sermon, instead of having a “live” preacher on site. NPCC is also in strategic partnership with churches in Athens, GA, Peachtree City, GA and Dothan, AL. Those three churches are not campuses of NPCC, but they are affiliated with NPCC and may use NPCC’s resources (North Point Ministries Website 2005).

NPCC has Sunday morning services, and a high emphasis on community groups, but fewer or no activities Monday through Saturday (North Point Community Church Website 2005c). NPCC’s senior pastor is Andy Stanley. He has been the senior pastor since the founding of NPCC. The Stanley name is very well known in the Christian community in Atlanta, since Charles Stanley, Andy Stanley’s father, has been the senior pastor of First Baptist Church of Atlanta since 1971. Andy Stanley has written several books, including *7 Practices of Effective Ministry* and *Creating Community* and *5 Keys to Building a Small Group Culture*. Andy Stanley usually wears khakis and a golf shirt on Sunday mornings.



Figure 7: Andy Stanley, Senior Pastor of NPCC

The mission statement of NPCC is “leading people into a growing relationship with Jesus Christ” (North Point Community Church Website 2005d). NPCC’s target audience includes unchurched people, who have no church background or who grew up in church but have not been to church in many years; and mature believers, who want to invest in the unchurched. NPCC uses the following analogy to describe their three main environments: the foyer, the living room, and the kitchen. The foyer of a house is the entrance, the place where people meet each other. The foyer is the Sunday morning worship service, which is a large group gathering. The living room of a house is used for entertaining, where people can sit around the coffee table and get to know each other. At NPCC, there are a few living room environments for different age groups and life cycle stages, such as FUSiON for singles, a bimonthly meeting, MarriedLife Live for married adults with quarterly events, and Xtreme and InsideOut for students. The kitchen is the most popular room in the house, where family and friends sit around the kitchen table and build deeper relationships. NPCC’s small groups, also referred to as community groups, are part of the kitchen environment. There are small groups for married adults, singles, and students.

“Community Groups are small groups of 5-8 singles or 4-6 couples that meet in someone's home for fellowship, Bible study, prayer, and accountability” (North Point Community Church Website 2005a).

Chapter 2 reviews literature references to theories applicable to religious research, from the disciplines of geography, economics and sociology. The beginning of chapter 3 presents the data and data sources, including the acquisition and the accuracy of the data. The chapter then explains the methodology of geocoding and incorporating the county and census tract level data for the demographic analysis. Chapter 4 includes the distance and demographic analysis and the results. It also addresses research on mega churches, suburban religious trends, and denominational factors of church membership. Chapter 5 contains a summary and conclusion.

Chapter 2- Literature Review

Religion is a widely studied subject in a variety of disciplines, such as sociology, psychology, and economics, as well as geography. The research conducted in geography concerning religion ranges from studying sacred buildings (Tillman and Emmett 1999.) to the flow of pilgrimages (Mori 2001). In recent years, a large number of articles have been written about religion from an economic viewpoint. In part the high emphasis on capitalism, the economy, and consumerism in North America influences such a tilt. This literature review explores writings related to theories such as *rational choice theory* (Iannaccone and Everton 2004), an economic model based on supply and demand, including cost-benefit analysis (Finke and Stark, 1989), and the concept of *distance decay* (Tobler 1970).

2.1. Geography of Religion

In his article about humanistic geography, Tuan (1976) discusses the subfield of the geography of religion. He states that “the field is in disarray for lack of a coherent definition of the phenomenon it seeks to understand” (Tuan 1976, 271). He suggests that a humanist geographer studying religion needs to ask what the meaning of religion is. He considers the difference between a religious culture and secular culture to be the degree of impulse for coherence and meaning. Religious cultures, in his view, seek coherence and meaning in the world by looking to a supernatural being, such as God in the Christian faith, to provide that coherence and meaning.

Sopher (1981) provides a summary of geographic research related to religion and religious institutions. He points out the following subcategories within geography of religion: “American denominational geography; the landscape impress and spatial organization of certain conspicuous American sects; sacred centers and pilgrimages” (513). There has been discussion about whether geographers can conduct meaningful religious research, if they are not trained in religious studies. Sopher finds that geographers can make a contribution due to the following skills: “being able to interpret landscape, to analyse ecological process and to conceptualize systems of spatial interaction” (513). Sopher mentions the lack of scientific-positivist methods in the geography of religion.

Levine (1986) suggests a historical materialist approach to the geography of religion in order to include the socio-environmental impacts of religious institutions. He offers the study of institutions, class formation and historical analysis to better understand geography of religion.

Levine lists many examples of the geography of religion:

“whole religious complexes and their implications, the spatial distribution of religious groups in several countries, the diffusion of religious groups, the practise of pilgrimage, the domestication of plants and animals for religious purposes, the acquisition of minerals for religious reasons, the cemetery as a cultural artifact, and the practice of food avoidance” (431).

Both Sopher and Levine criticize previous research in the geography of religion as being mostly descriptive.

Kong (1990) reflects on the historical developments in the field of geography of religion, ranging from ancient Greek geographers, to ecclesiastical geography, which maps the spatial advance of the Christian faith, to biblical geography, and to the physicotheological school, which explains all of nature with a divine creator. In the 18th and 19th century, the geography of religion adopted an environmentally deterministic approach. In the 20th century, the geography of

religion experienced a major turning point when researchers began “to study religion’s influence on social and economic structures” (Kong 1990, 358). Today, Kong sees disarray in the field caused by a lack of coherence and consensus.

Holloway and Valins (2002) recognize two key points to further our understanding of geography of religion “how the religious and the spiritual were and are central to the everyday lives of vast numbers of individuals” (5-6) and how geographers can advance the field through theoretical developments, as well as empirical studies. Holloway and Valins point out how “religious beliefs are central to the construction of identities and the practice of people’s lives” (6).

MacDonald (2002) examines the spatial expression of worship. He is critical of previous research in this field stating that “both media and academic understandings of the space of worship appear sketchy and erroneous” and “the very concepts of ‘space’ and ‘worship’ have been inadequately theorized” (62). Although MacDonald realizes that worship is only one aspect of religious life, he considers it to be an important aspect, because “it emphasizes what people do rather than what they ‘are’” (68). MacDonald appeals to include “the complexity in the desire to worship” (68). MacDonald defines worship “as the human response to a belief in the greatness of God” (69). He sees worship as a part of cultural geography, since cultural geography attends to senses and the body.

Stoddard and Prorok (2003) provide a definition of religion: “Religion is a system of beliefs and practices that attempts to order life in terms of culturally perceived ultimate priorities” (759-760). The AAG Subgroup that is concerned with religion is called “Geography of Religion and Belief Systems.” Stoddard and Prorok mention “a sense of oughtness or obligation” (760) in regard to religious behavior. This paper will analyze whether those people

who attend suburban mega churches feel that sense of obligation, or whether they are making a conscious and free choice to attend church. If church attendance was based solely on a sense of obligation, one suspects a nearby, conveniently located place of worship would be chosen. Stoddard and Prorok also discuss the difference between being a believing researcher, which is called “religious geography” and being an observer, a non-believing outsider to the particular religion under study, which is called “geography of religion”. As post-modernism indicates, all research is influenced by the values and norms of the researcher. Stoddard and Prorok (2003) think that geography will continue to explore religion, since “as long as geographers seek to explain the spatial behavior of humans, there will exist the need to analyze religion and similar belief systems geographically” (763).

Sands and Smock (1994) study trip behavior in relation to places of worship. Using data from the 1991 Detroit Metropolitan Area Public Policy Survey, they conclude that most people travel to a place of worship that is relatively close to their home. “A substantial minority of the respondents, however, spent 15 minutes or more on their journey to church” (185). They find a correlation between trip length and frequency of attendance and income. They also consider trip length to church in relation to religious affiliation, race, marital status, household size, age, occupation and education. Their research is based on interpreting the results of a survey, not an actual spatial study between the residence and the church locations.

Tobler originally developed the concept of *distance decay* (1970, 236). The basic definition of distance decay states that there will be less interaction the further the distance. The application to religious choice is that individuals will attend the closest church within their professed denomination to their residence. Past research and surveys have shown that many people choose to attend a church that is not the closest to their place of residence.

Many geographers when studying travel patterns have focused mainly on work-related travel. Nelson and Niles (2000) study trips made for non-work related purposes. Non-work related travel “now accounts for about three-fourths of all person trips and four of five household vehicle trips” (2). They point out that “nonwork travel is inherently complex and therefore more difficult to address analytically” (3). Nelson and Niles also study the effect of income on the increase in non-work related travel. They conclude that there has been an increase of non-work related travel in all income groups.

Previous research on distance traveled to church has been largely based on surveys. The exact wording of the question varies, but tends to be similar to “How long does it take you to travel from home to church (one way)?” (Ammerman 1997, 378). Other research also concluded that there are differences in the distance traveled between denominations. The Catholic Church, in particular, draws its members from a relatively contained area due to the official parish boundaries (Ammerman 1997; Farnsley 2003). Protestant churches, however, draw from a larger impact area. Farnsley (2003) states that “only about 40 percent of the members of an urban Protestant congregation live in the immediate neighborhood” (49). Members of orthodox Jewish congregations tend to live in close proximity to the synagogue due to the travel restrictions on the Sabbath (Ammerman 2003).

Much research has been devoted to the differences in religiosity between urban, suburban and rural areas. Breault (1989) suggested that “there probably is not an important rural-urban difference in the rate of church adherents” (1050). Chalfant and Heller (1991), on the other hand, concluded that “rural respondents are more likely than their urban counterparts to accept the Bible as the literal word of God” (82). Carlos (1970) found a higher rate of church attendance in the suburbs, and interpreted it “as a manifestation of the need to identify with the suburban

community” (756). Roof (1976) states “as city size increases, orthodox beliefs tend to decline” (p. 199). Ammerman (1997) points out that other analysts have predicted that cities’ “diversity, density, and sheer size would bring both the loss of community” and the decline of religion (349). She, however, suggests that although the relationships are more dispersed, city people do not have fewer relationships than people living in rural areas (350).

Religiosity is strongly linked to regional differences in the U.S. There is a perception that religion is more important to Southerners than to non-Southerners. Zelinsky (1961) published an article discussing the religious regions of the United States. He identified the South as a distinct religious region, particularly because Baptists are highly represented in the South. Clarke (1990) studied the *Bible belt thesis* by assessing whether there was an overrepresentation of clergy in the South between 1890 and 1930. He argued that the origin of the Bible belt can be traced back to the years after the Civil War, because captive people, as the Southerners were at the time, are likely to turn to religion to resist captivity (213). Chalfant and Heller (1991) also examined regional differences in religion, and concluded that “Southerners show the highest incidence of praying followed by Midwesterners, Westerners and Easterners” (79). Roof (1976), however, by examining several studies, found “that southern versus non-southern differences in the basic patterns of religious commitment may not be as great as sometimes assumed” (200). When comparing the significance of region to urban versus rural residence, Chalfant and Heller (1991) showed that “geographic region appears to be of greater importance in predicting frequency of church attendance and frequency of prayer than does rural residence” (79). Carroll (2002) presented a summary of various writings on regionalism and religion. He provided an overview of the regional discourse on religion starting in the 1960s with Zelinsky and Gaustad to Newman and Halvarson who published an *Atlas of American Religion* in 2000.

2.2. Economics of Religion

The study of religion from an economic viewpoint can be traced back as far as Adam Smith's book "The Wealth of Nations" wherein he introduced the idea that the concepts of competition, monopoly, government regulation, and market forces apply to religious institutions the same way they apply to other sectors of the economy (Iannoccone 1998).

The contemporary study of *economics of religion* begins with Azzi and Ehrenberg's "household allocation of time and church attendance" (Azzi and Ehrenberg 1975). Other household-allocation-of-time models stop when a person dies. However, this is different for a religious model, since an integral part of many religions is an afterlife, and therefore the benefits of a potential afterlife, including the hope of that afterlife, as well as the afterlife itself, need to be accounted for in a religious model. Azzi and Ehrenberg refer to this afterlife benefit as the "salvation motive" (Azzi and Ehrenberg 1975, 32). They also include the consumption motive, the satisfaction gained from inherent religious beliefs and purely social reasons, and the social pressure motive, which points to the benefits gained from church attendance in business. Azzi and Ehrenberg study the variables of race, gender, income, social class, and education in relation to household allocation of time at church and church-related activities.

Iannaccone is another contemporary researcher in the subject of economics of religion. He has published several articles in this discipline since the early 1980s, expanding on Smith's earlier ideas and Azzi and Ehrenberg's more recent works. Iannoccone, as well as other researchers, approaches religion from a *rational choice viewpoint*. Rational choice theory explains how individuals choose their religious orientation, the denomination, and the local church they attend, the frequency of attendance, as well as the level of financial contributions to the church. Contrary to earlier research, it is now widely accepted that religious choices are made

with rationality, as opposed to being explained by supernatural forces, or individual irrationality. “We can throw out old notions about religious irrationality. Religious people are not looney or deluded; they use the same reasoning processes as everyone else to gain the goods they seek” (Spickard 1998, 100). “According to rational-choice, people are not trapped by their beliefs, nor do their beliefs prevent them from changing. Instead, change is normal and theological fluidity is the accustomed state of affairs” (Spickard 1998, 103)

Although many religious variables appear to be subjective in nature, in order to apply a cost-benefit analysis to religion, these variables must be quantifiable. Iannaccone, among others, have researched the costs of religious adherence. These costs include time, money, and lack of societal acceptance.

“These days, however, time is the principal cost of mainstream practice, or more precisely, the total value of time foregone on account of the practice. To estimate the price of church attendance in monetary terms, it thus suffices to multiply the hourly value of a person’s time by the full amount of time sacrificed in order to attend. This price corresponds to what an economist would call the marginal cost of attendance – the minimal sacrifice required to attend one more service” (Iannaccone and Everton 2004, 197).

The benefits can be spiritual, educational, and social. There are also other correlated benefits such as mental health, reduced stress, increased life satisfaction, physical health, and stability in marriages. “In choosing whether to attend on a given day, attendees effectively turn religious observance into a type of “commodity” or “product” (Iannaccone and Everton 2004, 192).

Rational choice theorists characterize such choices as a matter of “demanding” or “consuming” those commodities that yield net benefits. In other words, they characterize choice as a matter of weighing perceived costs and perceived benefits (current and future, concrete and abstract, actual and expected).

The notion of *supply and demand economics* can be applied to religion. The supply of religion can be quantified as the number of churches in a given area. Other sources of religious supply are religious radio and TV broadcasting. The demand of religion is the number of church members, attenders and visitors in the local church. Religious demand can also be counted by sales of religious goods, and attendance at religious events, such as concerts and plays. Finke and Stark are widely quoted authors in the study of supply and demand as it relates to religion. Bankston, however, points out that certain religious trends, such as the popularity of “born again” Christianity in the 1970s and 1980s, cannot be explained by the constant distribution of religious demand (Bankston 2003, 165).

There has been extensive research on the question of how *religious pluralism* affects religious commitment. The main hypothesis of pluralism states that the more churches and denominations there are in an area, the more competition there is, and the more members there will be, and the more committed the members will be (Wuthnow 1993, 107). Another hypothesis states that a high level of market share of one church or one denomination leads to a monopoly outlook, to complacency by the church leaders, and a lack of innovation, and will lead to decreased membership and commitment levels. The second hypothesis can be applied to the country level, such as comparative research between the United States and Sweden. Breault (1989) gives several examples that contradict the claim that religious pluralism has a positive effect on religious participation. “Catholic Rhode Island, which ranks first on religious participation, ranks 49th on religious diversity” (1050), whereas Washington ranks 48th on religious participation and first on pluralism” (1050).

Other researchers examine how religious pluralism can lead to secularization in a given society. Bankston (2003) states that “pluralistic societies, which incorporate numerous collective

goals, tend to move away from religious belief” (159). Churches may be thought of as religious “firms” competing for adherents in a structured marketplace. Market “regulation restricts competition by changing the incentives and opportunities of religious producers and the options of religious consumers.” In this view, so-called “secularization” is just the natural consequence of religious monopolies – state-sponsored churches – which, like all monopolies (say proponents), fail to meet “consumers” needs” (Spickard 1998, 100).

2.3. Sociology of Religion

Hoge and Carroll studied several social religious theories, including the *deprivation theory*, *child rearing theory*, *doctrinal belief theory*, and *localism theory*. The *deprivation theory* is based on the assumption that “persons suffering deprivation or dispossession” will be more acceptable of religion (Hoge and Carroll 1978, 107). The deprivation can be economic, social, organismic, ethical or psychic, but Hoge and Carroll found social deprivation to be the “principal social source of church commitment” (108). A subtheory of *deprivation theory* is the *family surrogate theory*, which predicts that “church involvement will be greater among the unmarried, widowed, and famililess” (115). The *family surrogate theory* will be tested in this study as part of the demographic analysis of the two suburban mega churches. Hoge and Carroll’s findings only supported the *deprivation theory* for persons of older age. DeVaus (1984) concurred with Hoge and Carroll in that “the social deprivation argument does not seem to apply” (254). DeVaus hypothesized that people not in the workforce may not feel that they contribute to society, and therefore feel socially deprived, which according to the *deprivation theory* should lead to higher religiosity. DeVaus’ data did not support that. He speculated that either feeling socially deprived does not lead to increased church participation or that not being in the

workforce does not lead to feelings of deprivation (254). Many aspects of deprivation can only be gathered through detailed surveys of church members and non-church members.

The *child rearing theory* suggests that people with young children have a high propensity to attend church. The reason they attend church is for the benefit of the family life and child rearing. Many churches have extensive educational and social programs for children. Hoge and Carroll concluded that families with children above the age of 6 attend more frequently than families with younger children, and couples without children (Hoge and Carroll 1978, 117). The validity of the *child rearing theory* will be examined in the demographic analysis of this study.

The *doctrinal beliefs theory* correlates the level of doctrinal belief with church participation and commitment. The more orthodox one's beliefs are, the higher the participation and commitment will be. Beliefs such as "the church is necessary for salvation" and that only one particular church holds God's truths, leads to even higher participation and commitment. Hoge and Carroll's findings supported this theory. Responses to a survey showed higher church participation and financial contribution for persons holding those doctrinal beliefs (Hoge and Carroll 1978, 119). Although the doctrines and creeds of the two churches under study are summarized, they are not analyzed from a theological standpoint, due to the geographic character of this study.

Hoge and Carroll explained the *localism theory*, but did not test it due to a lack of data. Roof (1976) referred to the theory as *theory of local-cosmopolitan plausibility*. Roof pointed out that "remarkably little progress has been made in developing systematic, empirically testable theories of religion" (195). Roof found "the primary prerequisite for any belief system" to be "the presence of an adequate socio-communal support structure" (197). "Local community attachments and interactive networks" (198) are considered the plausibility structure for church

religion. The hypothesis of this theory is that locals are more religious. Localism was measured by such questions as the significance of local news compared to national and international news. Roof examined two factors in more detail: education and community size. Roof concluded that with higher education levels, “socio-religious group participation goes up” (204). An increase of the local community factor led to an increase in the religiosity score. This study will examine how the local community or the lack thereof affects the membership of mega churches.

Ammerman (1997) in her book *Congregation & Community* discussed the tendency of people to attend church with other “people like them” (56). Hudnut-Beumler (1994) supported the same argument stating that “the typical suburban church had exactly what most prospective members were looking for in a religious home – people exactly like themselves” (8). Winter (1961) explained that “people in a metropolitan area associate with one another on the basis of occupation, prestige, income, residence, and style of life” (62). Although socio-economic data was not available from the churches under study, census tract data will be examined to find out whether Ammerman’s, Hudnut-Beumler’s and Winter’s suggestions are valid for mega churches. Bultena (1949) suggested a contradicting statement saying that “though it is clearly evident that church people tend to group themselves in churches and denominations according to certain social traits, it is probable that we find more heterogeneity in class-status in the average church than we find in any other large voluntary social grouping” (387).

Robert Putnam (2000) in his book “Bowling Alone” discusses the *social capital theory*. He says that “social capital refers to connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them” (19). He devotes one chapter to religious participation, since in his estimate “faith communities in which people worship together are arguably the single most important repository of social capital in America” (66). Putnam has

observed a trend of civic disengagement in our society today in the membership numbers of secular as well as religious organizations. In his analysis, there are several factors, which have contributed to the decline of civic engagement. The most significant factor according to Putnam is generational change, followed by the effects of electronic entertainment, suburbanization, commuting and sprawl, and the pressures of time and money (283-284).

Chapter 3- Data and Methodology

3.1. Church Membership Data

Two suburban churches north of Atlanta provided the membership data, which forms the numerical basis of this research. The author chose one Baptist church, since Baptist churches are very prevalent in the South, and represent a large portion of church members in this part of the country. The Baptist church under study was founded in 1837, but only started experiencing rapid growth in the last 20 years. The other church is an independent, non-denominational church, and was chosen as part of this study, since it is very representative of many of the younger mega churches. One of the reasons to choose these two particular churches was the rapid population growth of the counties to the north of Atlanta. This study investigates whether the drastic membership increase can be solely explained by the population increase, or is based on other factors. Another significant factor for choosing these particular churches was their willingness to share their data. Churches are very protective of their membership data, and have strict privacy policies. As explained below, both of these churches made exceptions to those policies for the purpose of this study. The author approached several other churches, but none of the other churches were willing to share their data.

Church data is self-reported by the members and attenders. For active members, the address itself should be fairly accurate, since the newsletter and tithing envelope are sent to the address that is stored in the database. It is possible, though that people are still in the church database, but no longer attend the church. Since churches do not track attendance in conjunction with the individual member records, churches cannot tell which members are no longer active. If

a person or family moves, they stay in the church database, until they request to be removed. Some churches try to clean out their database of inactive members. They might assign a certain number of potentially inactive members to an elder member of the congregation. The elder then contacts the members and confirms whether they still want to be enrolled at the church. The accuracy of the additional information is more questionable. Some of the information may not be complete, because some people may not be comfortable providing it, and some of it may not be current.

Both churches keep extensive records of their members' and attenders' addresses and demographic information, worship service attendance, as well as participation in other programming. FBCW provided address and demographic data for 19,000 members and attenders. FBCW uses a proprietary church management software, but was able to export the data into a standard format. The author initially established contact with the person in charge of FBCW's technology department, but he left the church shortly thereafter and was not able to finish the data export. The author then contacted Jim Law, the executive pastor of FBCW. FBCW was easier to persuade to share their data for the purposes of this research, and was very interested in the results and the maps. NPCC provided address data of their 34,000 members and attenders, as well as 14,000 records with demographic data for the head of household. Although the author is a member of NPCC, there seemed to be a higher level of bureaucracy and non-response at NPCC, such as not returning phone calls and auto-replies to email inquiries. After contact was established, NPCC was much more reluctant to share their members' addresses, and did not seem very interested in the results of this research. NPCC uses a standard database to store their membership information, but it was more difficult to export the data in a useable,

comprehensive format. Natalie Files at Buckhead church was very helpful in providing answers to Buckhead specific questions.

FBCW, similar to most Baptist churches, places a high emphasis on church membership. It is possible to join FBCW on the spot by stepping forward during the altar call at the end of a worship service. FBCW has more than 14,000 members out of the 19,000 records in their database. NPCC places a low emphasis on church membership, which is similar to many other non-denominational mega churches. NPCC has fewer than 5,000 actual members, but a weekly attendance of more than 12,000 people, and a database with more than 34,000 records. It is more difficult to become a member at NPCC, requiring attending a question and answer session, a three-page questionnaire, and a reference from another church member. At NPCC, it is highly recommended that church members are part of a community group.

FBCW will be displayed with a blue church symbol and blue outline colors in maps and charts, whereas NPCC will be shown in green. Any data showing the general population from the census tract data will be shown in shades of maroon. Gender variables not specific to FBCW and NPCC will be shown in light blue for male and light pink for female church members. Any of the data that are labeled as FBCW are from the FBCW membership database that FBCW provided in December of 2004. Any of the NPCC data references are from their database that was provided in October of 2004.

For the Thiessen polygon analysis a dataset from the Digital Environmental Atlas of Georgia (Alhadeff et al) from 1997 was used. The dataset includes more than 10,000 churches in Georgia. Within the core impact area, there are 223 churches.

3.2. Road Data for Geocoding Purposes

The road reference data used for the geocoding of the member addresses was downloaded from the Georgia GIS Clearinghouse. The entire road reference database is a compilation from three different sources, due to limited availability in certain counties. The source of the road data for the more densely populated metro counties is the Georgia Department of Transportation. The data is from 1997, and is in an ESRI shapefile format. This data was downloaded in decimal degrees. The less densely populated counties are also from the Georgia Department of Transportation, but they are in an ESRI ArcInfo exchange format partly from 1995, and partly from 1998. This data was downloaded in the UTM projection in zones 16 and 17. The county road data was then projected into an Albers projection to create a combined dataset that reaches across two different UTM zones to minimize distortion. The more populated counties have more detailed road information available, whereas some of the rural counties do not. At a later stage of the analysis, a few counties outside of Georgia were added to the road reference dataset. Those were downloaded from the ESRI website. To combine the different datasets, the format was changed from the shapefile and the ArcInfo exchange format to the ArcInfo coverage format. It was then projected to the same projection, and merged into one combined roads coverage. That coverage was then loaded into an ESRI ArcGIS 8.3 personal geodatabase.

3.3. Claritas and Tiger Data for Demographic Analysis

The demographic analysis of the counties and the core census tracts is based on Claritas and U.S. census TIGER data. The census attributes include population, gender, age, race, marital status, and number of persons in the household. The Claritas attributes include current and projected population growth, income and education, commute time, and vehicle ownership. Geodemographic data and analysis is very useful in analyzing spatial patterns. Commercial

geodemographic data as provided by Claritas is a representation of the general population beyond the factors that are captured by the census. Claritas data is based on questionnaires, and reflects lifestyle choices, in addition to basic demographic information. Geodemographic data is heavily used in store location selection. Just as GIS software with geodemographic data can predict successful store locations, so it can also be applied to churches. Especially NPCC can benefit from spatial information of their current and prospective members, because when pursuing a multi-campus strategy, they need to know where to locate the next campus. According to Birkin, Clarke, Clarke and Wilson, the application of store location research is “to evaluate sites to determine the potential store sales and hence the probability of success” (Birkin et al 1996, 62). Churches measure their success in the number of members and attenders. Important factors in choosing a church site include easy access, high visibility, enough land for future expansion, support of the community, if close to residential areas, and zoning.

3.4. Geocoding Method

The distance analysis of this study is based on geocoding the member addresses of the two churches. Using the geocoding functionality of ESRI GIS software, the geocoding process creates individual point locations on a map from the member addresses based on address ranges in the road reference data. The records in the church databases without an address are not included in the distance analysis.

There are two main reasons why an address cannot be geocoded to a physical location. The first one is an invalid or inconsistent address format in the address that is stored in the church database. The second reason is the fact that the road reference data is between seven and ten years old, and therefore does not include all the roads that have been built since the creation of the road data. There is a chance that a member’s address will be matched to the wrong

location. The author did not conduct an accuracy test of the geocoded locations. Past research has proven geocoding to be an acceptably accurate method for translating addresses into locations. One study to evaluate the accuracy of geocoding showed an accurate address match of 96% at the block group level, and 95% at the tract level (Krieger, Waterman, Lemieux, Zierler, and Hogan 2001, 1115). This high number of matches is not necessarily applicable to this thesis, because publicly available, free road data was used. Another study compared geocoded addresses to GPS locations. Geocoding is based on address ranges in a line feature, and divides the line feature in equal parts for each individual address. Therefore, the actual geocoded address may not be exactly in the location that a GPS receiver collects. The study found that “the majority of addresses were located within 100 m of the real address” (Bonner et al 2003, 410). A distance of 100 meters is sufficient to analyze the data for this study accurately.

To set up the geocoding processing, the road reference database is pointed to the address field in the church membership database. There are several parameters that can be adjusted, such as the spelling sensitivity of the address, whether to accept tied locations, and whether to add the x and y coordinates to the result table. By default, ArcInfo is set to an 80% spelling sensitivity, and it does accept tied addresses as valid locations. In the beginning of this analysis, the study area was limited to only Georgia addresses. After the first geocoding attempts showed that the match rate at FBCW was significantly lower than the NPCC match rate, counties outside of Georgia were included, since otherwise the results would have been skewed towards NPCC. Even when including the counties outside of Georgia, the match rate for FBCW was still much lower than for NPCC. However, FBCW’s church database has a much higher number of records without addresses. When only using the records that have addresses, the match rate for FBCW is 64%, and the match rate for NPCC is 73%. The percent of tied records for FBCW is 13%, and

the tied rate for NPCC is 7%. The percent of unmatched is similar between the two churches, 23% for FBCW, and 20% for NPCC (Figure 8).

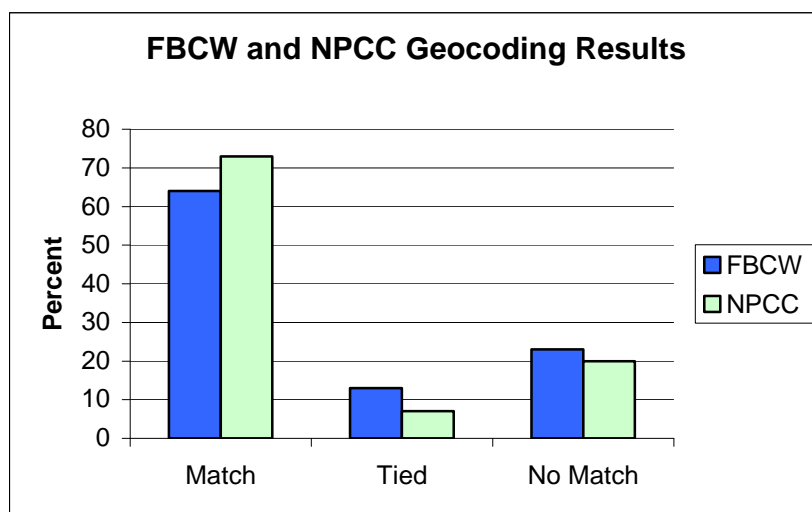


Figure 8: Geocoding Results for FBCW and NPCC Address Data

3.5. Distance Analysis

A straight-line distance analysis from the member residences to the church facilities was conducted. The straight-line distance was chosen rather than a road network distance due to data limitations. The straight-line distance underestimates the distance traveled to the churches, since it is shorter than the road network distance. During the initial processing a distance value was calculated for each geocoded location, and added to the member table as a value in miles. During the further analysis, an ArcInfo macro was used to draw a buffer around each geocoded location with the radius of the distance to the church that member attends. A spatial query then determined how many other churches are within the same distance to that person. Desire lines between the church and the member residences show the extent of each of the churches' reaches. Desire lines are often used in retail trade area analyses to show the drawing power of a shopping center (Hartshorn 1992, 143). To create the desire lines, the church address was specified as the origin, and each of the geocoded addresses was specified as the target. The Generate command

in ArcInfo Workstation drew the connecting lines. Thiessen polygons were created to show how much area each church covers, if every person chose to attend the closest church. Using the ArcInfo Workstation command Thiessen, the Georgia churches under study were specified as the input point feature. The software then generated polygons around each of the churches. If two churches are located close to each other, the Thiessen polygons will be proportionally smaller than the Thiessen polygons around churches that are located further apart. Since the size of the Thiessen polygons is the significant factor in considering the distance between churches the polygons which were completely inside or intersected with the boundary of the core census tracts were chosen for this part of the analysis.

The distance analysis in this study is based on a straight-line distance, instead of the actual route on the road network that the church members take to drive to the church. Because the distances between the FBCW church members and FBCW and between the NPCC members and attenders and NPCC are both measured in straight-line distances in miles, they can be compared to each other. However, many other studies are based on surveys, and state the distance over the road network and sometimes in minutes, rather than in miles. Publicly available road data is generally not usable for a network analysis, whereas more accurate, commercial road data may include network connectivity and additional attributes, such as speed limit, and road direction.

3.6. Demographic Analysis

The demographic church membership data was analyzed with various formulas and SQL statements. The analysis is based on a comparison to previous findings pertaining to the same variables, as well as comparisons between the two churches, where data was available for both churches. The results will show whether the mega churches under study appeal to specific

demographic groups, and whether they have the same demographic breakdown as non-mega churches. For some of the factors, they were used in conjunction, such as gender by itself, marital status by itself, and gender and marital status together. The population data of the counties under study was used to analyze whether the high membership rates of the two mega churches under study can be solely explained by the population growth.

3.7. Definition of Study Area

3.7.1. Counties under Study

Because members and attenders travel as far as 110 miles to each church, the study area covers North Georgia, as well as parts of northeastern Alabama, southeastern Tennessee, and southwestern South Carolina. Certain data, such as the church dataset, are only available for the Georgia counties.

3.7.2. Core Impact Area

Although some of the members and attenders come from as far as 110 miles away, for most of the analysis the study area will be confined to a core impact area around each church. The core impact area will include those census tracts, which combined draw more than 50% of the church members or attenders. In FBCW's case, the core impact area consists of south Cherokee and parts of north Cobb County, made up of those census tracts where more than 1% of the church members live. For NPCC, it includes the northern part of Fulton, the southwestern part of Forsyth, and two small parts of Gwinnett County, where more than 0.9% of the NPCC members and attenders live. There is no overlap between the two core impact areas. The boundaries of the core impact areas are the same as the outer boundary of the census tracts surrounding the two churches. Especially when comparing the demographic membership data to

the demographic attributes of the census tracts, the areas outside of this core impact area do not provide significant results, since only very few members and attenders actually live there.

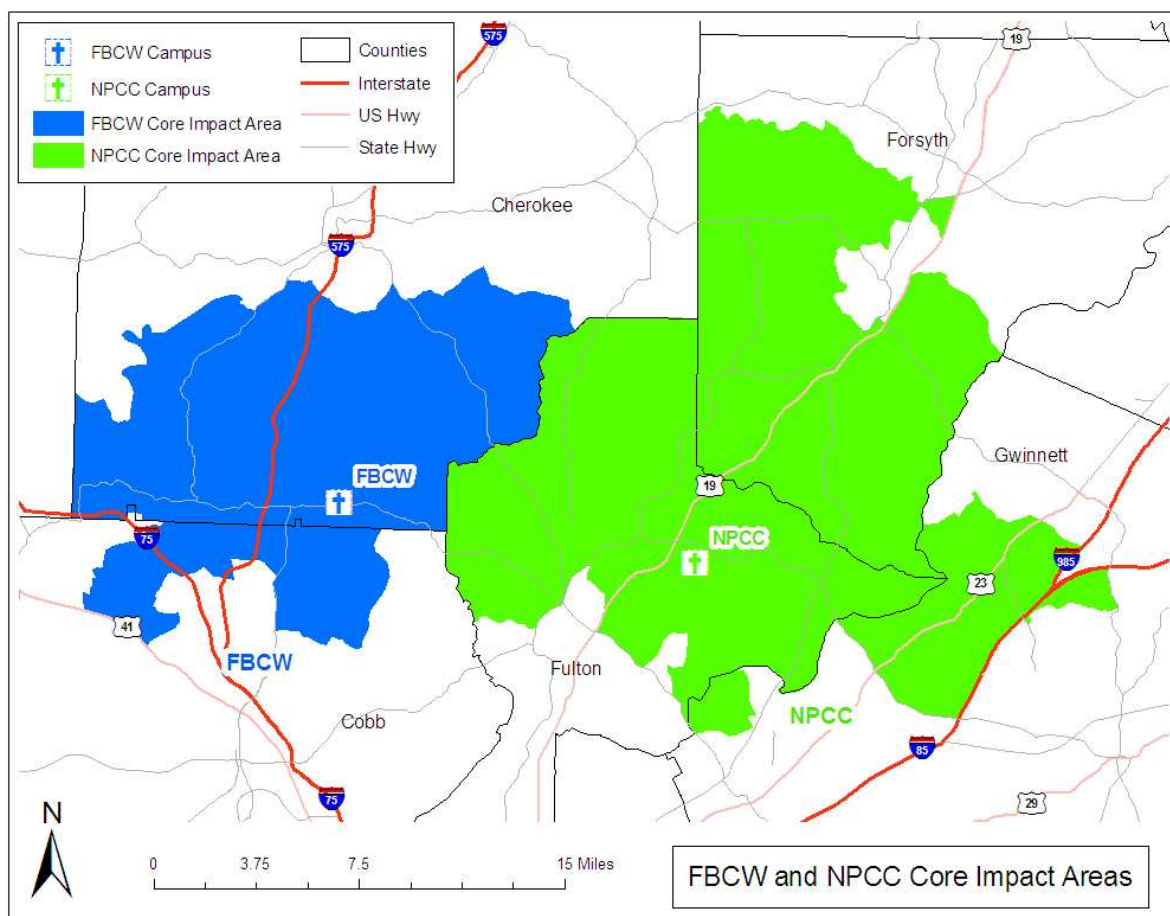


Figure 9: Core Impact Areas of FBCW and NPCC

Chapter 4: Analysis and Application

4.1. Introduction

The following section of this thesis examines the church membership increase at the two suburban mega churches under study. General statistics about churches and church membership in the United States, Georgia and metropolitan Atlanta will be presented. Further analysis will establish that the church membership increase at the churches under study is greater than the population increase during the same time period. The increase at the two churches is also greater than the average increase at other churches in the United States, Georgia, and Atlanta. The distance traveled to these two mega churches is also greater than the findings in previously published studies. The demographic study of the core impact area will show that the churches target specific population groups.

Number of Churches and Congregants in the United States

Many countries include a question about religious identification in their national census. The U.S. census does not. Zelinsky (1961) explains the fact that religious information is not gathered as part of the U.S. census:

“The constitutional doctrine of the separation of church and state has come to be interpreted in many quarters as even prohibiting the collection by a government agency of any information concerning churches, much less any facts regarding the religious status of individuals” (142).

Therefore, religious statistics are gathered from surveys or directly from the religious organizations (National & World Religion Statistics 2005). Based on the surveying organization, there are different estimates of how many Americans self-identify as Christians. The American Religious Identity Survey (ARIS) conducted in 2001 found that 76.5% or 159 million Americans self-identify as Christians. According to the Yearbook of American and Canadian Churches of 2004, the Catholic Church was the denomination with the most members in the U.S. with 67

More than half the congregations (51%) reported growth between 1995 and 2000. Slightly less than half (49%) either stayed the same or had declining membership (Thumma 2004b). Churches located in newer suburbs reported the most growth, a finding particularly significant for metropolitan Atlanta. Figure 11 shows a classification by class at the county level, whether the county is considered rural, suburban or urban.

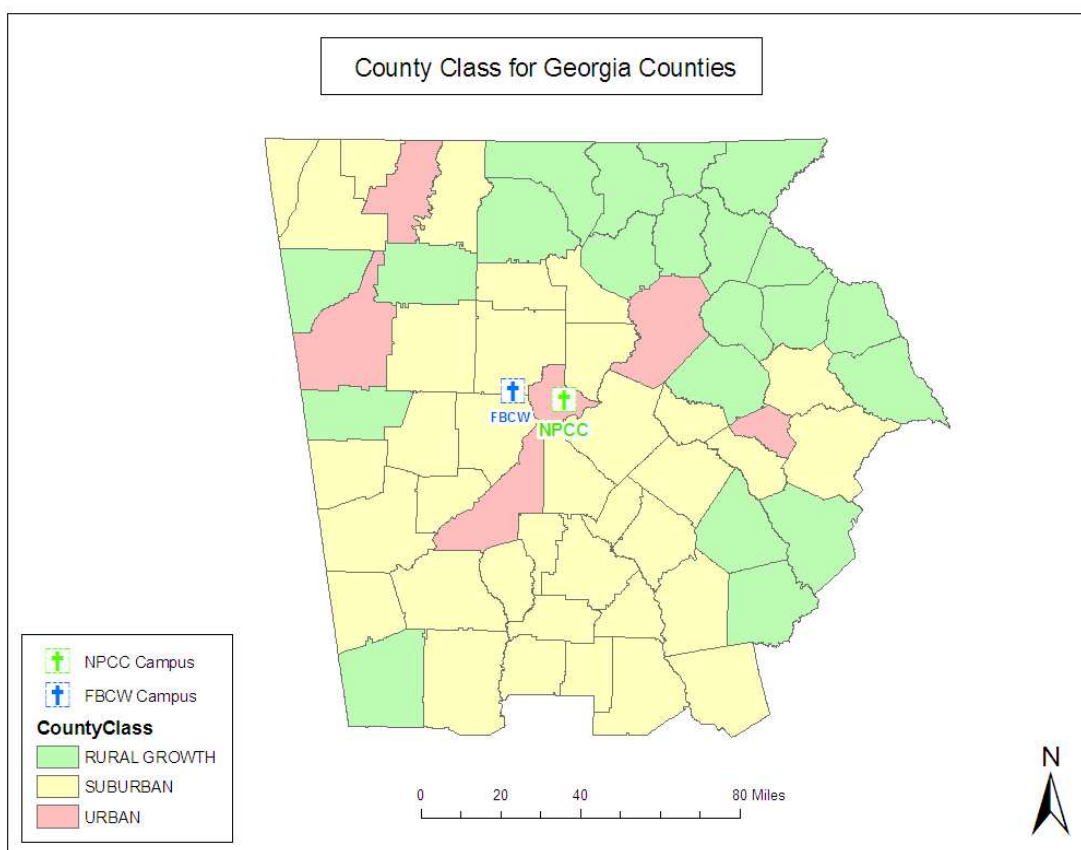


Figure 11: County Class for Georgia Counties (Georgia Facts and Figures)

Mega Churches in the United States

Currently more than 800 mega churches exist in the United States. California reports the highest number of mega churches, while Georgia reports the fourth highest number. Over 75% of mega churches are located in the sunbelt. When normalizing the number of mega church attenders by the population in each state, Washington D.C. has the highest percentage (4.86%) of

mega church attenders with only a small number of mega churches and a total of 26,900 mega church attenders. Oklahoma has the second highest percentage with 1.97% and Georgia ranks third with 1.79% (Thumma 2004a).

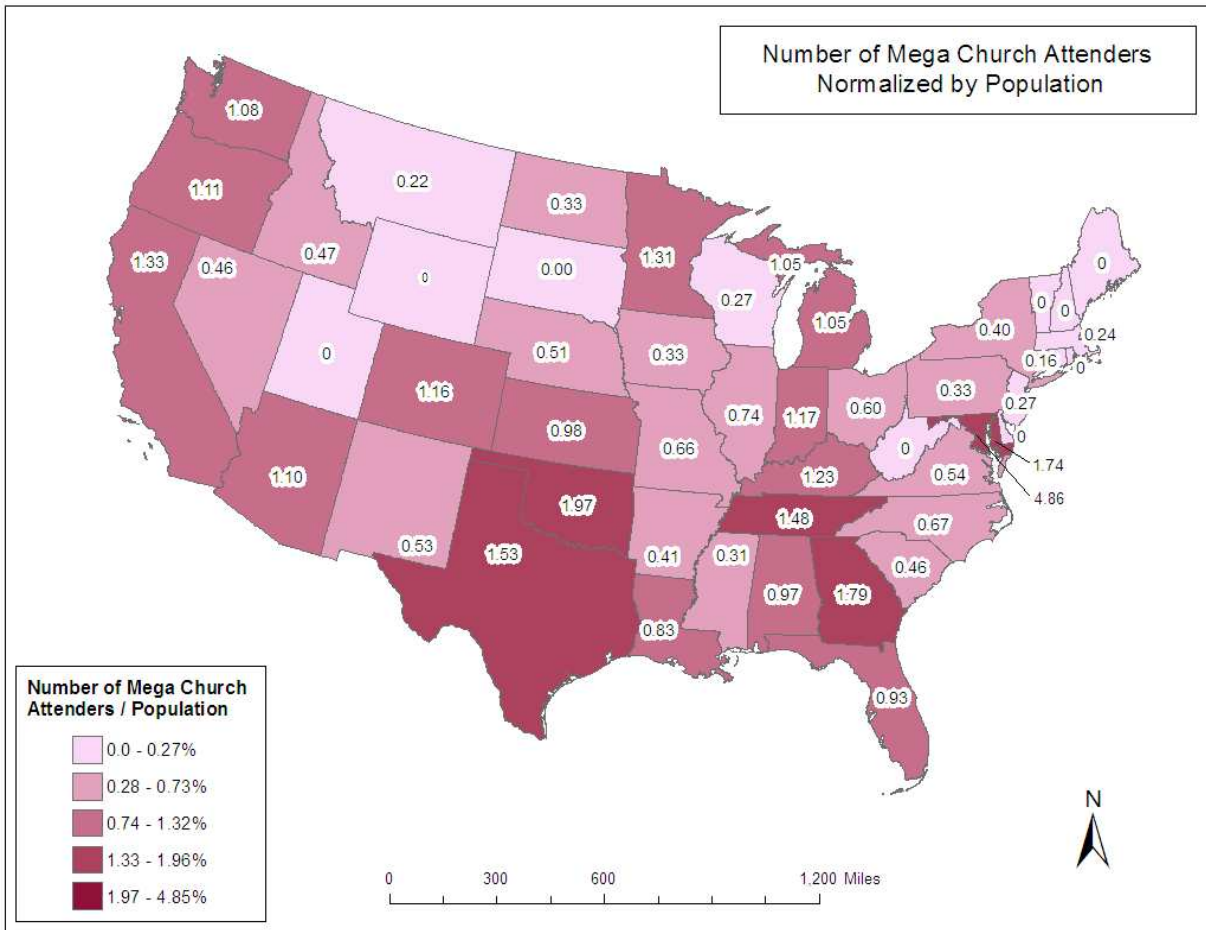


Figure 12: Number of Mega Church Attendees By State – Normalized by Population

Most mega churches are located in suburbs of major metropolitan areas, on highly visible tracts of land with easy access to the interstate or major highways. Almost 50% of all mega churches are independent, non-denominational churches. Churches belonging to the Southern Baptist Convention make up 20% of all mega churches. In 1992, there were 40 mega churches in metro Atlanta (Thumma 2004a). Both Thumma (1996) and Miller (1997) have studied mega

churches extensively and compiled a list of characteristics, shown in table 1, that are shared among many mega churches.

Table 1: Characteristics of Mega Churches and Mega Church Congregants

Mega Church Characteristics	Mega Church Congregants
Modern phenomenon	Young to middle aged adults
Organizational similarities	Average age of 35 years
Highly accessible location	70% married with two children
Conservative theological orientation	College educated
Strong central leadership	Middle class
Particular style of worship with innovative music	60-70% are female
Similar ministerial patterns	Encourage diverse ethnic and racial backgrounds
7 days of activity per week	Participants often drive 10 to 30 minutes
A small group based social community	

Historical Increase in Church Membership

There is a perception in today's media that we currently live in times that are becoming more secular. "It is argued that Americans are losing their religious identity and are becoming secular, atheistic, materialistic, and indifferent to their religious heritage" (Huntington 2004). However, church membership in the United States actually increased steadily since 1776. In 1776, only 17% of the population were members of a church, in 1850, 34% were members of a church, in 1906, 51% were church members, and in 2000, 62% of the U.S. population were members of a church (Iannaccone, Finke, Stark 1997).

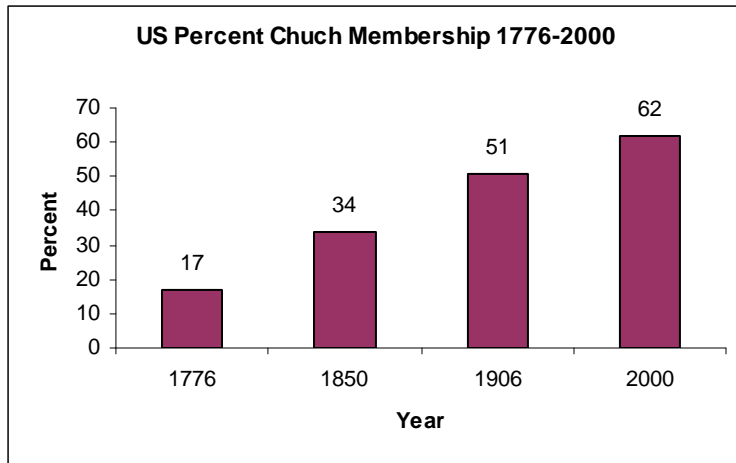


Figure 13: U.S. Population Historical Church Membership

Recent Church Membership Increase in the U.S., Georgia and Metropolitan Atlanta

The number of church congregants in Georgia varies significantly by county. When normalizing the number of church members of major religious groups, some counties have as few as 24% church members, compared to some counties with more than 70% church members. There is not a clear pattern between the county class (urban, suburban, and rural) and the number of church members.

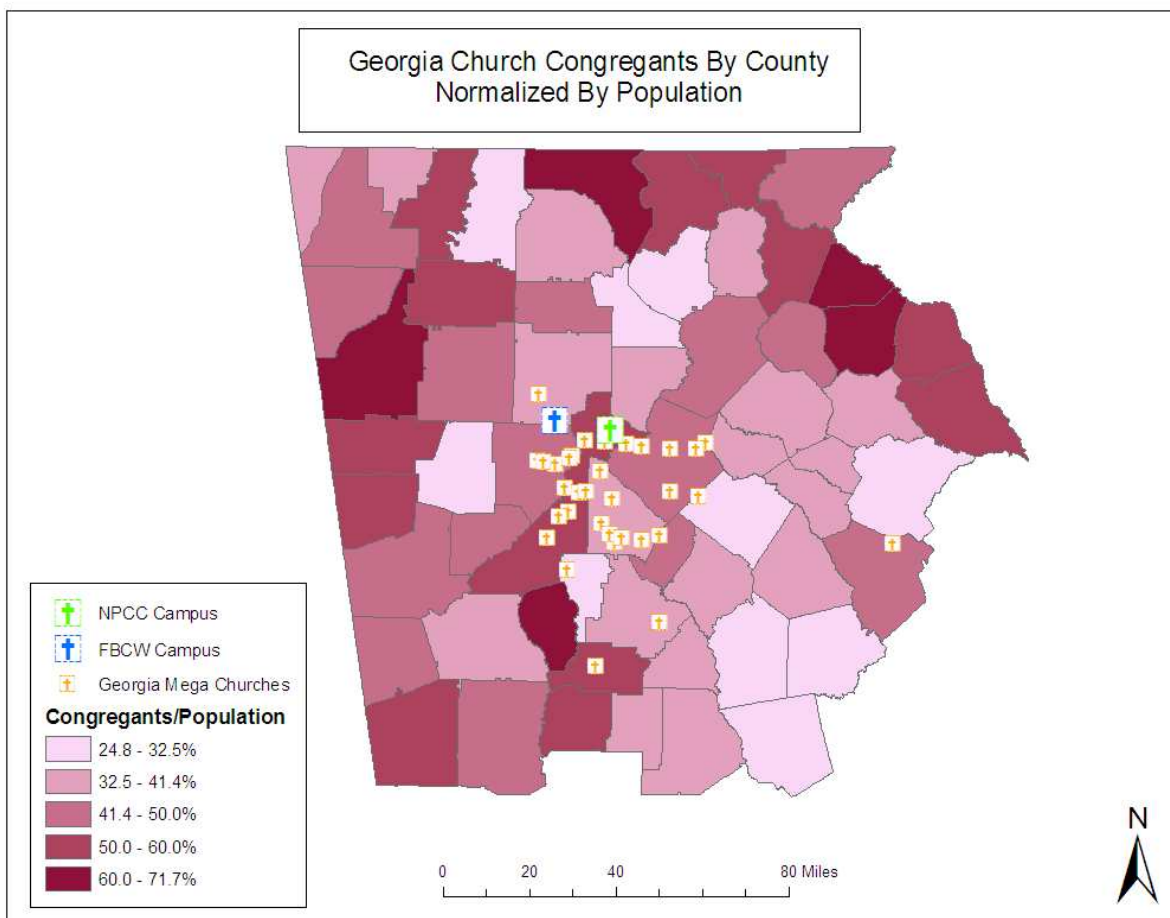


Figure 14: Church Members of Major Religious Groups in Georgia Including Mega Churches

Church membership over time varies significantly by denomination. In the United States, membership in churches belonging to the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) increased by 5% between 1990 and 2000, whereas membership in independent, non-charismatic churches decreased by 7.5% during the same time period. Compared to the national membership, the numbers for Georgia differ significantly. Between 1990 and 2000, the church membership in Georgia SBC churches increased by 8.7%. Although membership decreased on the national level, there was actually an 8.6% increase in independent non-charismatic church membership in Georgia. The numbers for metropolitan Atlanta diverge even more from the national average, with an increase of 17.2% in SBC church membership and an even higher membership increase

of 30.4% percent in independent, non-charismatic churches (Association of Statisticians of American Religious Bodies 2002).

First Baptist Church of Woodstock Membership Increase

First Baptist Church of Woodstock (FBCW) was founded in 1837 with 12 members. Between 1837 and 1987, membership only increased slowly, and even showed slight decreases for some years. By 1987, FBCW only had 1,600 members. Between 1987 and 2004, the membership increased much more rapidly from 1,600 members to 14,426. This is an increase of almost 800% in 18 years, which is an average annual increase of 14%, ranging from an increase of 45% between 1987 and 1988 to a 5% decrease between 1992 and 1993. In 1991, FBCW moved from its old location in downtown Woodstock to its current location off Highway 92 in Cherokee county. FBCW built a new worship center in 2004, which can seat up to 7,500 people. The population of the core impact census tracts around FBCW increased by an average of 3.6% per year from 1990 to 2000, compared to the 14% increase in church membership at FBCW. This shows that the church membership increase at FBCW is much higher than the population increase. FBCW is a member church of the Southern Baptist Convention. Total membership change in churches belonging to the Southern Baptist Convention between 1990 and 2000 was 5%, which is also lower than the FBCW increase of 14%. Johnny Hunt, the senior pastor of FBCW, began his pastorship at FBCW in 1986. It appears that he was very instrumental in the growth of FBCW that started around that time.

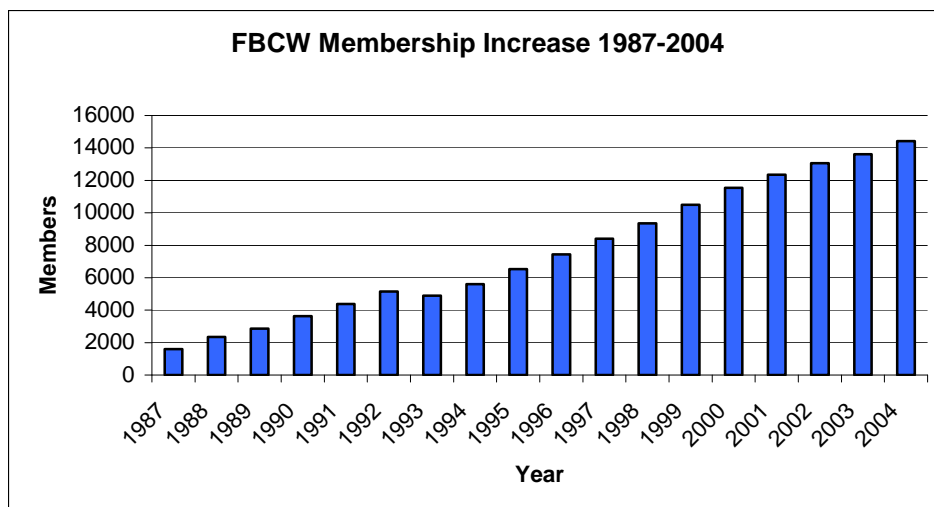


Figure 15: FBCW Membership Increase

North Point Community Church Attendance Increase

North Point Community Church (NPCC) is a much younger church. It was founded in 1995 by a core group of 6 families. By 1998, when they opened their own building after using rented facilities for the first three years, NPCC had 2,100 regular attenders. NPCC does not place a high emphasis on official membership, but they track attendance very thoroughly. Attendance at NPCC between 1998 and 2005 increased by 710% in 9 years, from 2,100 people in 1998 to 16,200 in 2005, which is an annual increase of over 50%. The population of the core impact census tracts around NPCC increased by an average of 4.4% between 1990 and 2000. NPCC is an independent non-denominational church. Membership in independent non-charismatic churches in the U.S. decreased by 7.5% between 1990 and 2000.

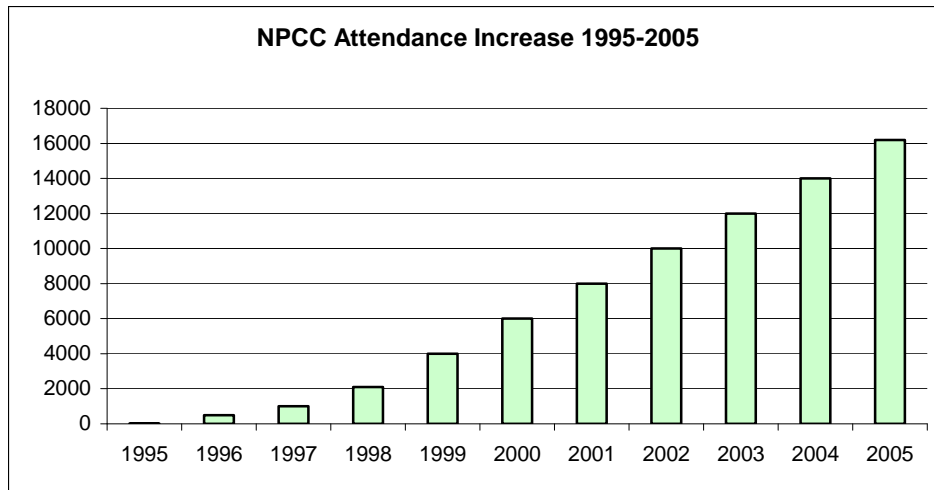


Figure 16: NPCC Attendance Increase

Church Membership Increase Compared to Population Increase

The population increase in the core impact census tracts between 1990 and 2000 ranged from 2% in the census tract with the least amount of growth to 538% in the census tract with the most growth, with an average population growth of 91% and a median population growth of 31% in the FBCW core impact area, and an average population growth of 159% and a median population growth of 139% for the NPCC area. The church growth of the two churches can partially be attributed to the population growth, but the fact that there are some churches with stagnating and even declining memberships shows that the growing mega churches must provide an appeal that the other churches lack. The specific factors will be discussed in more details in section 4.4 of this thesis. The following maps are based on the core impact areas, which are defined as those census tracts around the two mega churches, which combined draw more than 50% of the church members and attenders.

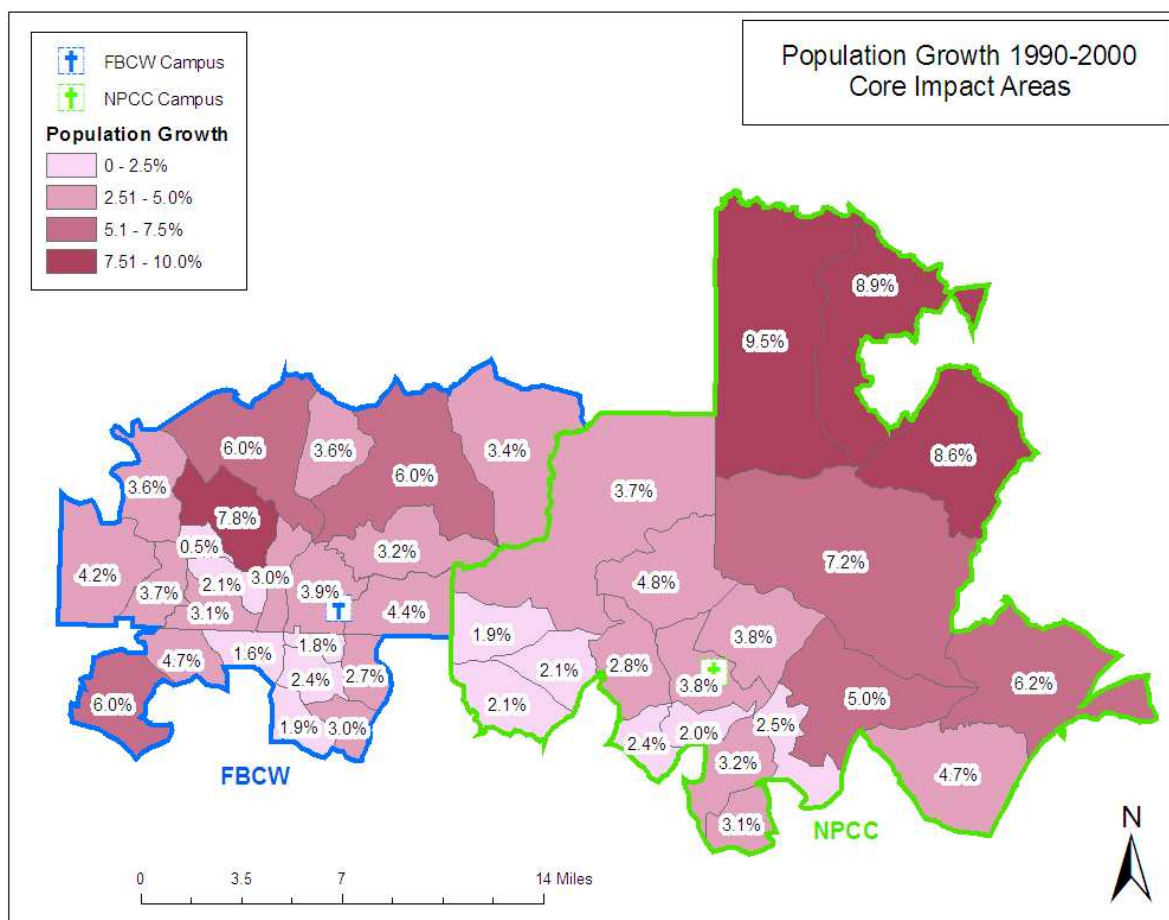


Figure 17: Population Growth in the Core Impact Areas

Effects of Residential Mobility on Church Membership

The high population increase in Georgia between 1990 and 2000 is a result of domestic migration, international migration, and births. The question for the purpose of this study is whether a high migration rate has a positive or negative effect on church membership. Do people who move to Georgia from another state or country find a church and become members, or are they likely not to join a church? A study based on data from the “American National Election Study” in 1977 examined whether residential mobility has an effect on church attendance. When comparing people who are currently living in the same region that they were raised in to those who have moved, the percentage of people still living in the same region and attending church

weekly is higher than the people who have moved and attend church weekly (Wuthnow and Christiano 1979, 267). When comparing church attendance in relation to the number of years lived in the present location, there is a notably higher attendance rate the longer a person has lived in the same place. For example, only 17% of White Protestants who have only lived in their current residence for less than one year attend church weekly. Out of those who have lived in the same residence for two to four years, 21% attend church weekly, compared to 24% of those who have lived in the current residence for five to ten years. Living in the same residence between eleven and twenty years, leads to a weekly attendance rate of 30%. Out of those people in their current residence for longer than twenty years, 26% attend church weekly (Wuthnow and Christiano 1979, 263). There is speculation, however, that people who move to an area where they do not have family or a circle of friends, may try to find a church home to meet people and build a social support system.

4.2. Distance Analysis

Based on the geographic concept of distance decay, which was originally developed by Tobler in 1970, activity declines with increasing distance from the point of origin (Wikipedia Website 2005). Tobler said “everything is related to everything, but near things are more related than distant things” (Tobler 1970, 236). Applying that concept to the distance between a church member’s residence and the church he or she attends predicts that the further a church is from a person’s residence, the less likely it is that he or she will choose it as his or her place of worship. Reversely stated, it means that a person will attend the closest church of the specific denomination to his or her residence. However, recent research by the POLIS Center finds that many church attenders do not attend their neighborhood church:

“Members of ten Protestant congregations lived an average of more than 3 miles from church. More than half of 170 churches claimed to have most of their members coming from “outside the neighborhood” to attend worship. Fewer than 20 percent of local residents in an inner-city neighborhood, an inner suburban neighborhood, and an outer suburban neighborhood attended worship in their own neighborhood. Over 50 percent of clergy commuted more than 3 miles to church” (Diamond 1999).

Diamond states that “one finds the highest tendency toward religious commuting among Protestant churches” (Diamond 1999). Although there is a tendency to assume that religious commuters feel a lack of community, since they do not attend the same church as their neighbors, “religious commuters often display a very strong sense of community, albeit one based on shared interests rather than geographical proximity” (Diamond 1999). Long commute times to church are not a recent phenomenon, since studies from the 1930s, 1950s, and 1970s also show that “large portions of congregations do not attend a neighborhood church” (Diamond 1999). Wuthnow, however, found a reason that has led to driving further distances to church beginning after World War II. Talking about a local church, he said that “it was the invention of the automobile heater that led to the church’s demise.... The heated sedan made it possible to drive unheard of distances” (Wuthnow 1993, 22).

Many members and attenders at FBCW and NPCC drive a long distance to get to church. FBCW members drive an average distance of 15.3 miles and a median distance of 6.3 miles. The NPCC members who attend the main campus drive an average distance of 12 miles and a median distance of 7.5 miles, whereas the NPCC members who attend the Buckhead campus drive an average distance of 13.2 miles and a median distance of 5.8 miles. Based on the distribution of the other churches in the study area, there are many churches that people drive by on their way to FBCW and NPCC. There are even people who live closer to FBCW who attend NPCC and vice versa.

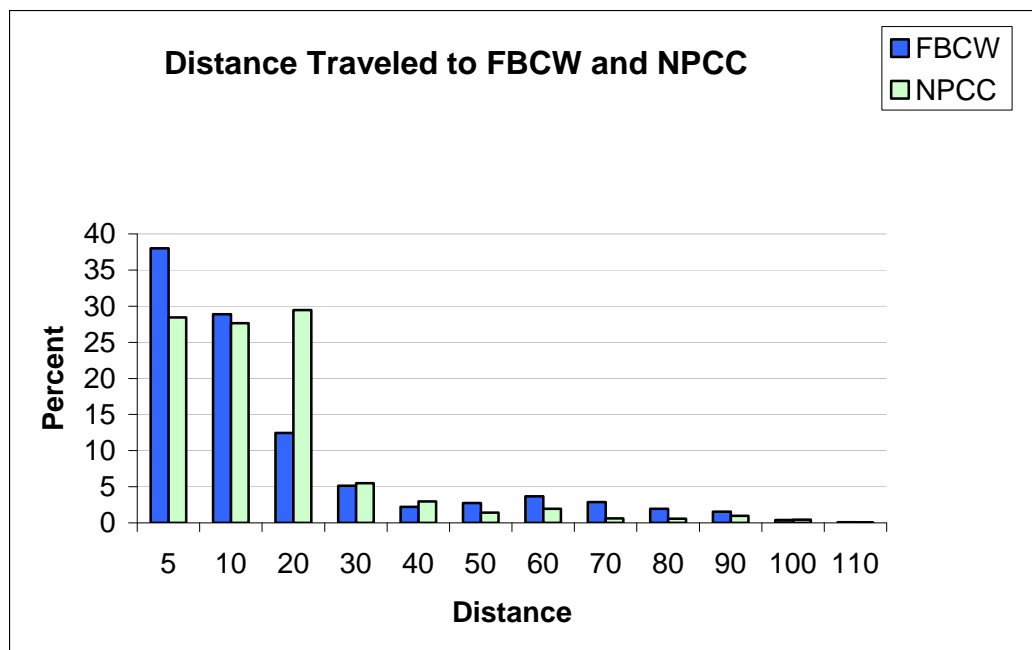


Figure 18: Distance Traveled to FBCW and NPCC

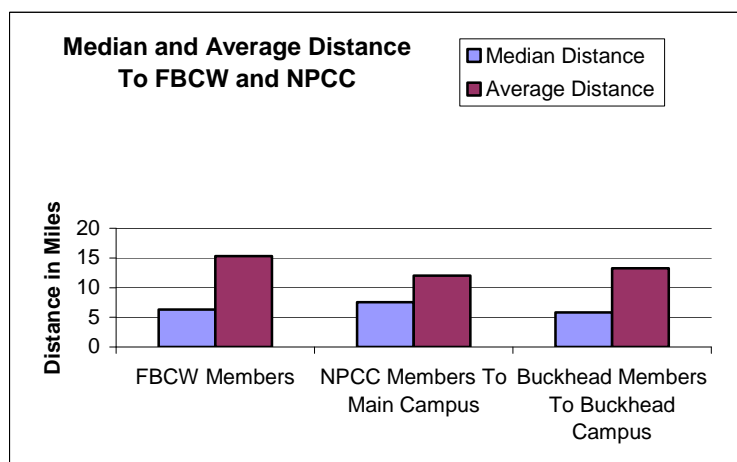


Figure 19: Median and Average Distance Traveled to FBCW and NPCC

At FBCW, 38% of the members live within 5 miles of the church, 29% live between 5 and 10 miles, and 12% live between 10 and 20 miles, which means that more than 20% of the members drive more than 20 miles to get to the church. Some members drive as far as 102 miles.

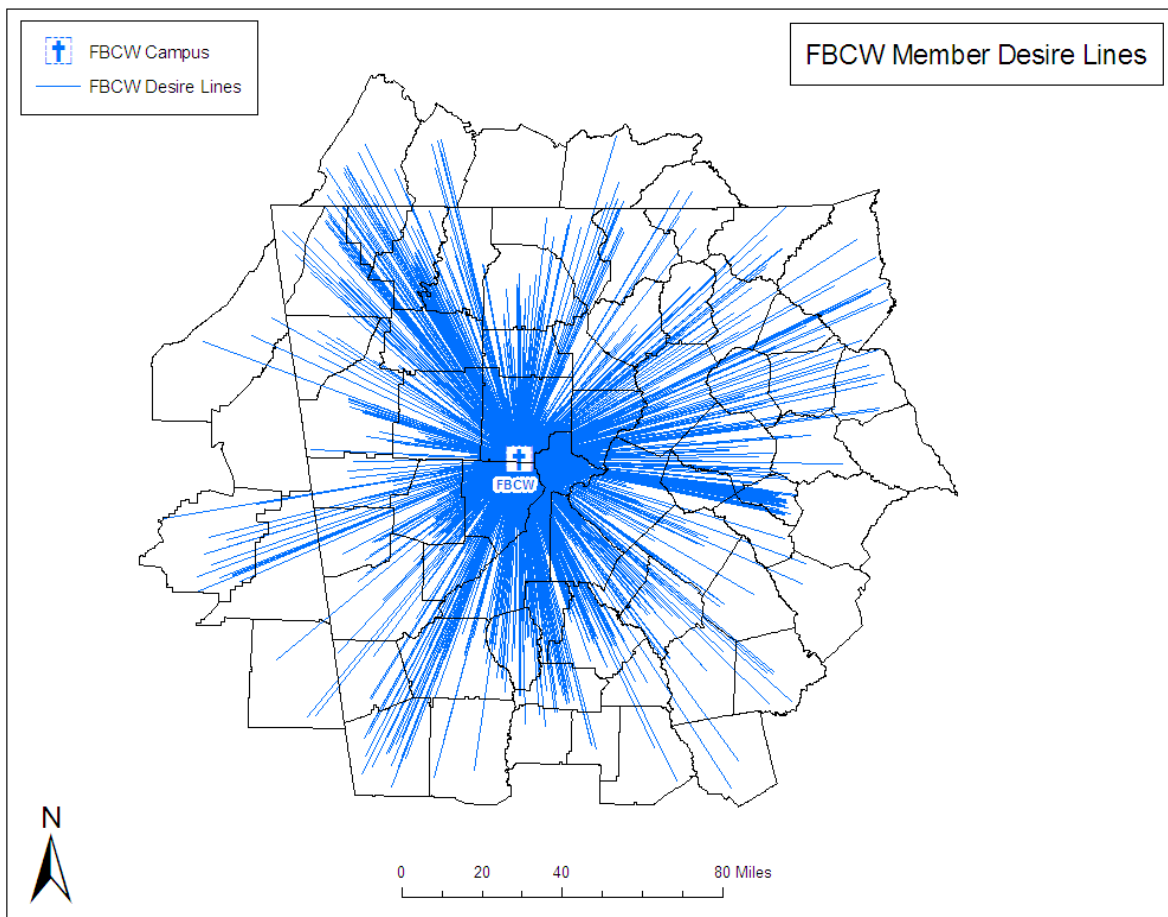


Figure 20: Desire Lines to FBCW

At NPCC, only 28% of the attenders live within 5 miles to the church, another 28% live between 5 and 10 miles, and 29% live between 10 and 20 miles, which means that 14% of the NPCC attenders drive more than 20 miles every Sunday morning to attend the worship service. Some members drive as far as 104 miles.

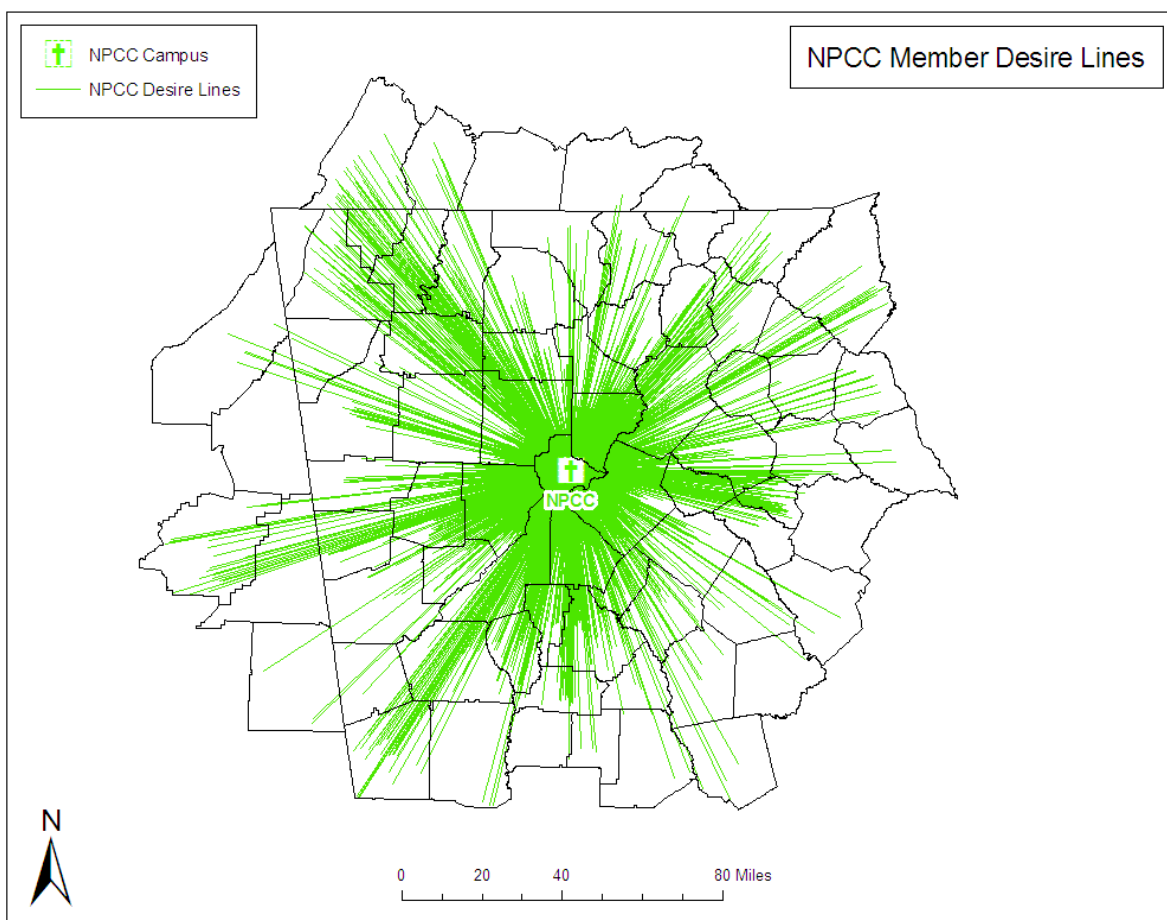


Figure 21: Desire Lines to NPCC

FBCW uses advertisement by direct mailings to zip codes in the surrounding counties of the church to announce several large-scale events that are held at the church on an annual basis, such as their popular Easter service. FBCW also has a large sign close to a major surface street, which many people drive by on their way to and from work. This sign announces weekly as well as special events. The advertisements and the sign attract first time visitors to FBCW beyond the reach of the local neighborhood. NPCC does not use any form of unsolicited advertisement. They only announce weekly and special events by requested email and newsletter subscription. NPCC promotes an “Invest and Invite” strategy of having its members invite their friends and neighbors to church.

There are no significant differences of distance traveled to FBCW in combination with demographic factors. As mentioned below, previous studies, such as the one by Sands and Smock in 1994, also concluded that demographic factors do not affect the distance traveled as significant contributors.

Commute Times

These distances are surprising, especially considering the fact that metropolitan Atlanta is known for long work commutes. In the core impact census tracts around FBCW and NPCC, the average travel time to work ranges from 30 to 45 minutes. According to the Clean Air Campaign website, metro Atlantans “spend more than 1.7 billion vehicle hours traveling, an average of 438 hours per person” annually (The Clean Air Campaign Website 2005).

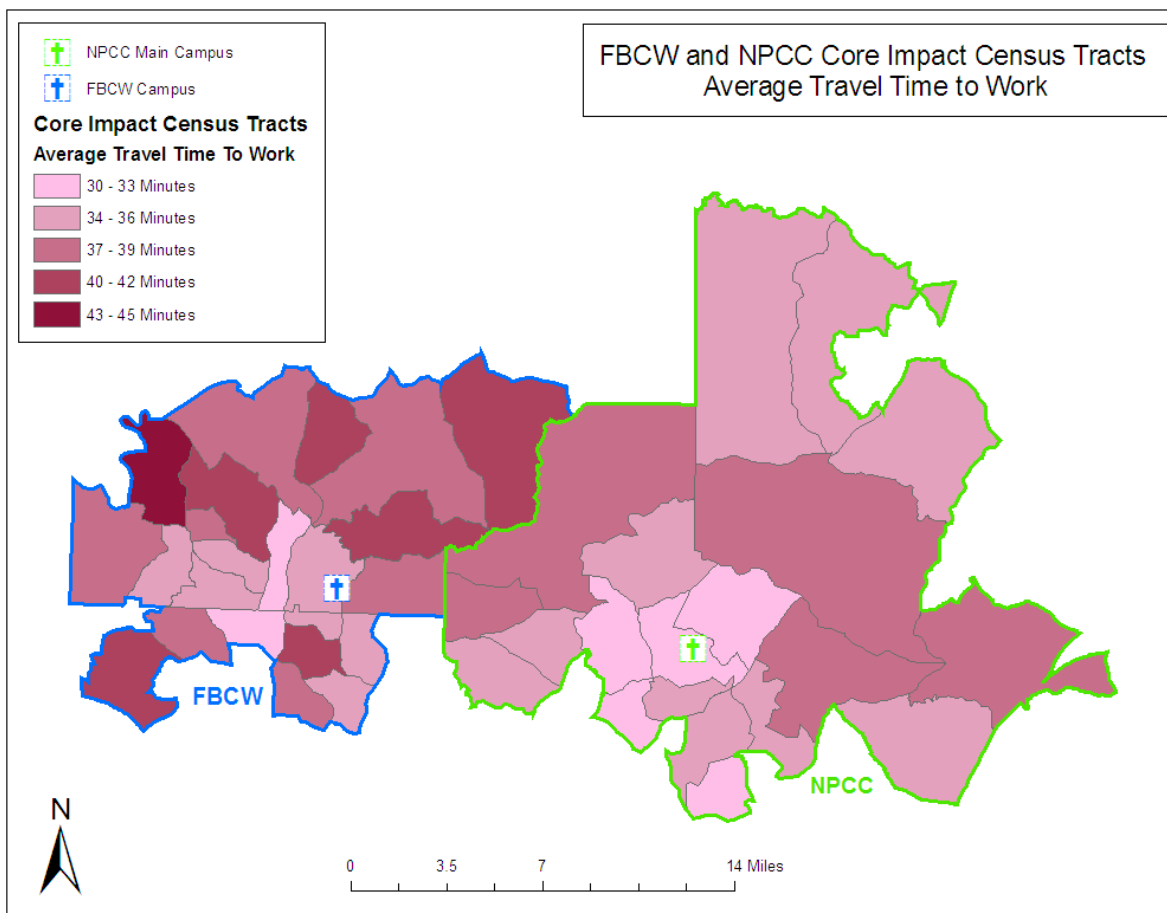


Figure 22: Average Travel Time to Work in Core Impact Areas

A possible expectation is that since people have to drive very far to get to their workplace during the week, they would choose a church that is near to their residence, so they would not have to commute on Sundays as well. However, Ammerman says that “people are willing to drive out of their immediate neighborhoods to attend congregations that offer programs and styles of worship that are not widely available and are especially suited to their own particular needs” (Ammerman 1997, 324).

Vehicle Ownership

Vehicle ownership rates range from 1.5 to 2.7 vehicles per household in the core impact areas. Compared to urban households, many suburban households own at least one vehicle, if not

even two or more vehicles. Therefore, it is easier for suburban church members to attend a church that is further away than it is for urban residents. Urban residents are more likely to attend a neighborhood church and either take public transportation or walk to church. “Sixty percent of U.S. households have two or more cars, according to 1996 estimates by Urban Decision Systems. In 1960, just 20 percent had two cars. In 1990, almost 16 percent of households had three or more cars; in 1960, fewer than 3 percent did” (Edmondson 1996).

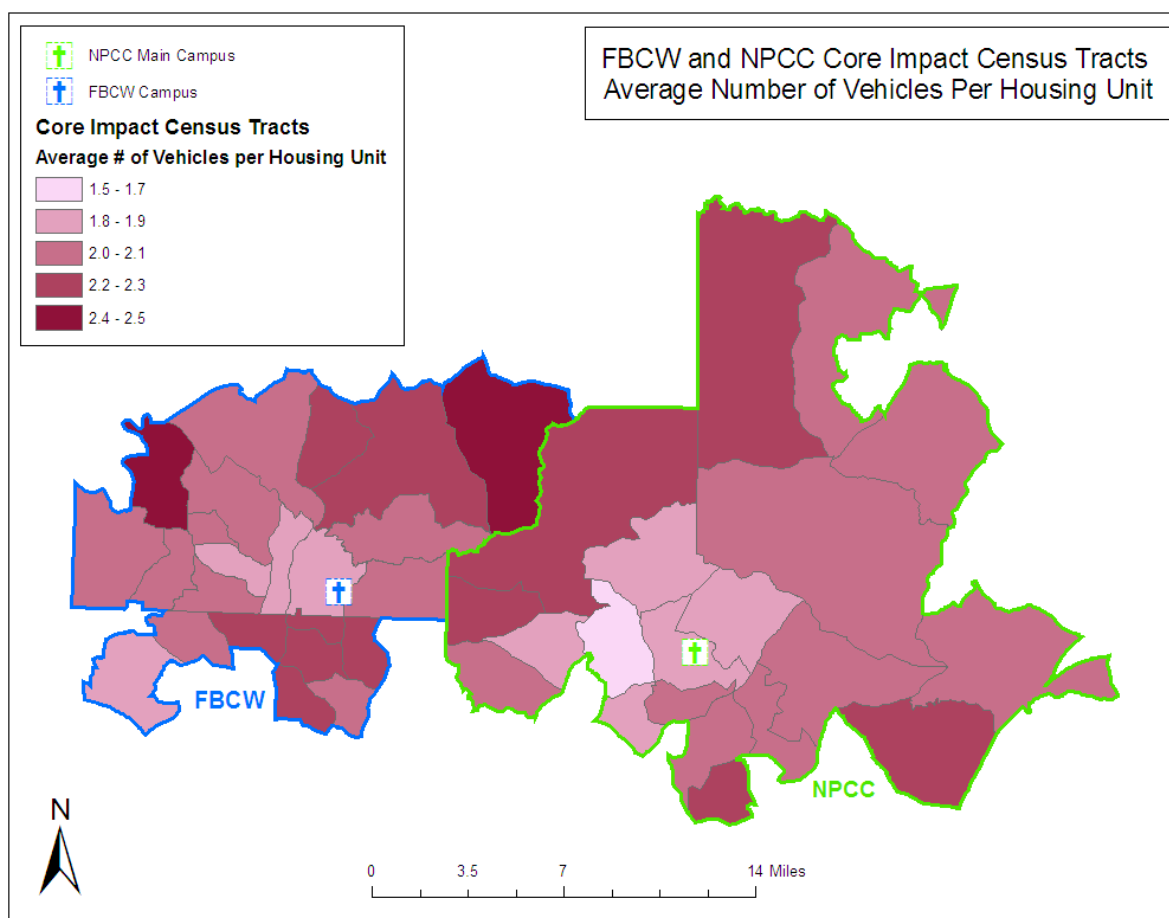


Figure 23: Average Number of Vehicles per Housing Unit in Core Impact Areas

Thiessen Polygons

Thiessen polygons can be used to show the distribution of churches in an area. The Thiessen polygon map shows how many other churches are in close distance to FBCW and

NPCC. Each polygon contains one church. The smaller and lighter colored each polygon is, the shorter the distance is between each church. FBCW is surrounded by very small Thiessen polygons, which means that there are several churches within close proximity. NPCC is surrounded by larger polygons, which means it is located in an areas where the churches are further apart from each other. When analyzing the core impact areas, however, the average Thiessen polygon for FBCW 5.41 sq miles, compared to 3.18 sq miles for NPCC, and 4.06 sq miles for the Georgia average. The median Thiessen polygon in the FBCW core impact area is 5.02 sq miles, compared to NPCC's 2.68 sq miles and a Georgia median of 3.43 sq miles. That means that the churches in the NPCC core impact area are closer to each other than the churches around FBCW, and closer than all the churches in Georgia.

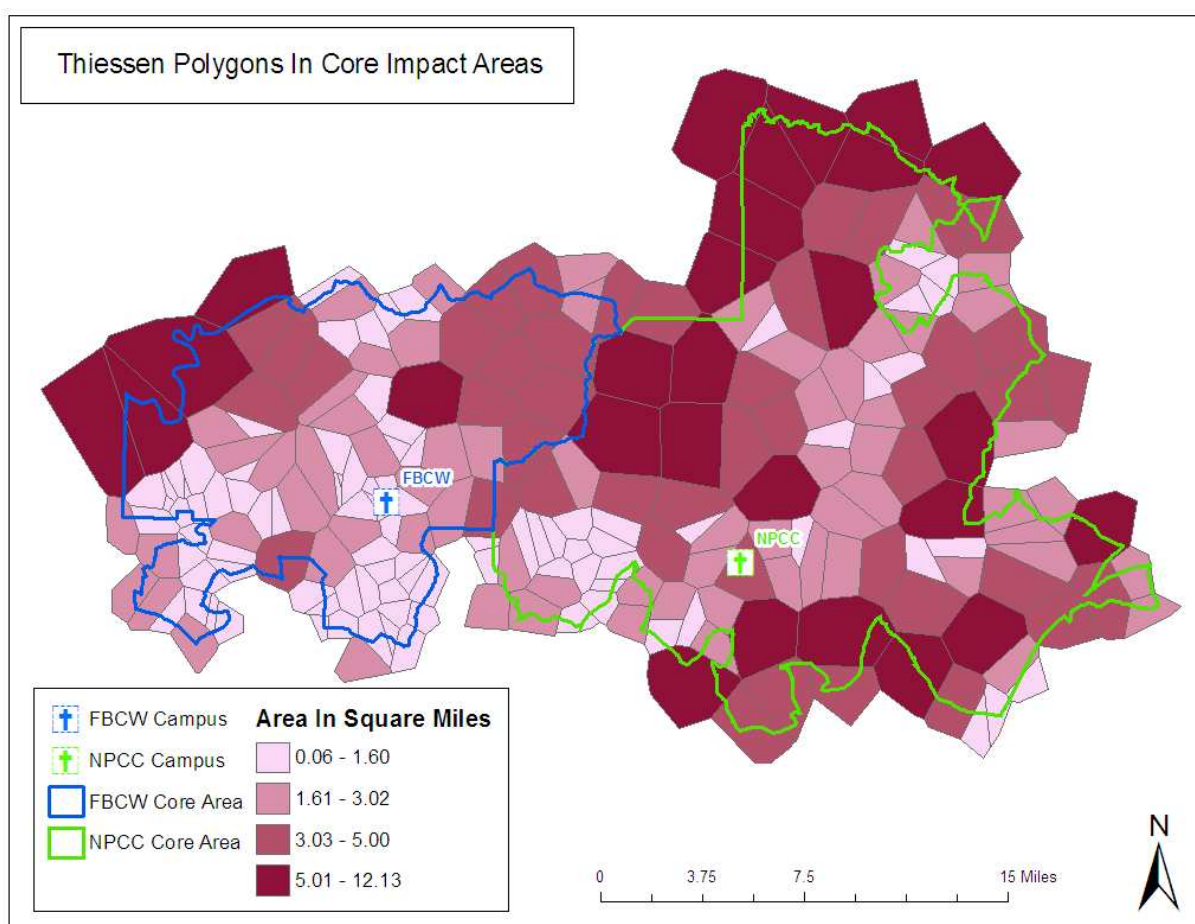


Figure 24: Thiessen Polygon Map of the Core Impact Areas

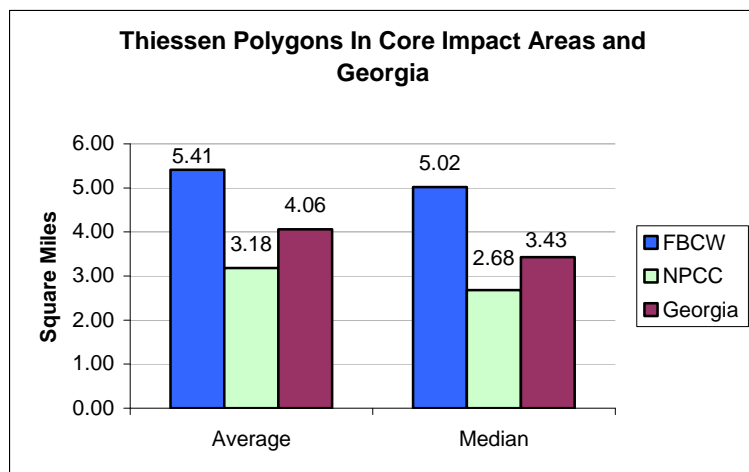


Figure 25: Thiessen Polygon Areas for the Core Impact Areas and Georgia

Previous distance studies

There have been several surveys on distance traveled to church, mostly based on surveys and estimated travel time, rather than a spatial analysis. According to Scott Thumma, “among congregations organized since 1990, there is a higher proportion of participants who commute more than 15 minutes to worship. Religious community is increasingly less equal to residential community” (Thumma 2004b).

Sands and Smock (1994) conducted a trip-to-church study based on Detroit survey data from 1991. Most of the respondents in the study attended a place of worship close to their home. The median trip time was only 10 minutes. Only “one in every 20 respondents said that they traveled half an hour or more to reach their religious services” (Sands and Smock 1994, 192). Although very lengthy trips were the exception, a substantial proportion of the respondents attended a religious institution outside of their neighborhood or community. Several factors influenced the difference in trip length: denomination, race, frequency of attendance, income, marital status, household size, age, occupation, education, and the part of Detroit, from which the church members came from. Sands and Smock concluded that race and religious affiliation were

the most significant factors for a longer journey to church. Specifically, African-American church members on average traveled further than white church members. In terms of religious affiliation, Catholic church members attended a church within 5 minutes of their residence, whereas Protestants traveled further. Of the Protestant denominations, Baptists traveled the furthest. Sands and Smock speculated that the importance of the individual preacher is higher for Baptists. The demographic variables such as marital status, family size, education and occupation, were not significant contributors to a difference in the journey to church.

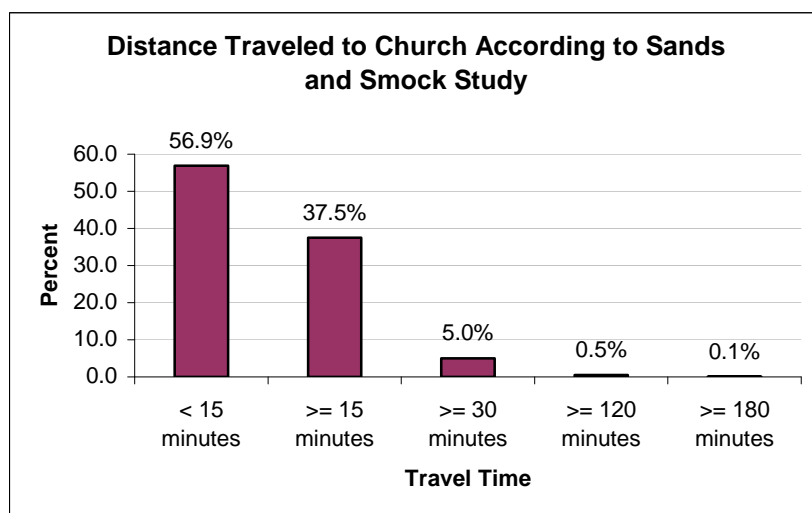


Figure 26: Distance Traveled to Church In Sands and Smock Study

Miller's (1997) survey of three paradigm churches in California and Hawaii in 1997 showed that a large portion (45%) of the congregation lived within 15 minutes of their church, 38% lived between 15 and 29 minutes from their church, 13% lived between 30 and 44 minutes, and only 4% lived further than 45 minutes from their church.

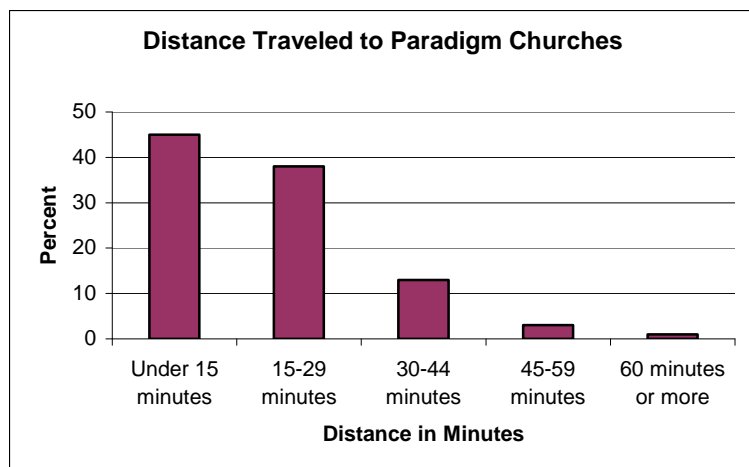


Figure 27: Distance Traveled to Paradigm Churches

Comparing FBCW and NPPC to the Notre Dame “Study of Catholic Parish Life of Volunteer Leaders” conducted in 1983, the distances traveled to FBCW and NPCC are much higher. The Notre Dame study showed that 24% of all respondents lived less than half a mile from the church, 43% lived less than one mile from the church, and 87% lived within 5 miles of the church. Only 4% of the respondents lived more than 10 miles away from the church, which is the largest distance listed on the survey question. These distances may be shorter than they would be for Catholic churches in general, since it can be assumed that volunteer leaders are more likely to live close to the church they volunteer at, compared to regular attenders who do not volunteer. It is important to note that the Catholic Church is different from Protestant denominations in that the parish lines are drawn by the authority of the central Catholic church leadership, rather than the local church or community. Catholic church members are more likely to attend the church that is closest to them that they are assigned to, rather than the church of their choice, which might be further away (Ammerman 1997, 35). Sands and Smock state that “some denominations, notably Roman Catholics, have a strong tradition of territorial parishes, while others, such as Baptists and Methodists, lack a hierarchical structure and allow greater choice in selecting a church” (Sands and Smock, 193).

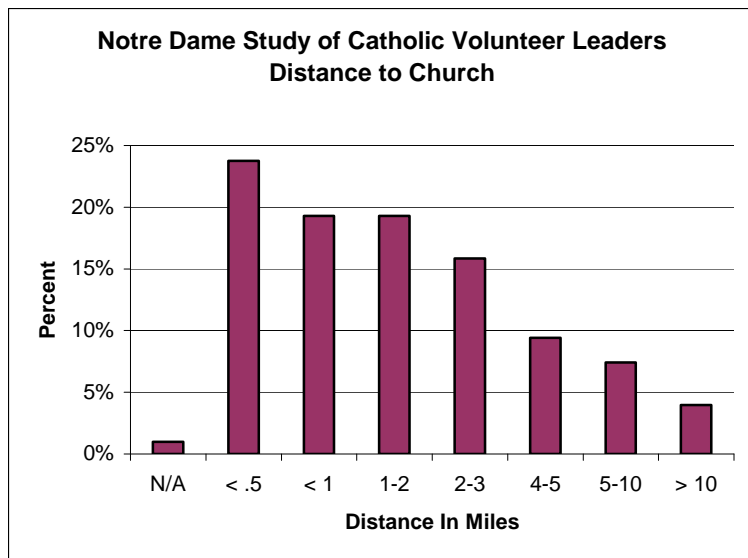


Figure 28: Distance Traveled to Church By Catholic Volunteer Leaders

Caused by the increasing suburbanization and further distances between their members and the synagogue, orthodox Jewish synagogues experienced declining attendance, since driving a motor vehicle to the synagogue on the Sabbath was a violation of the Sabbath law. This did not apply to the reformed Jewish congregations, since they interpreted the Sabbath law more liberally. “In 1950 the Rabbinical Assembly Committee on Jewish Law and Standards of the Conservative movement” (Klinger 2005) declared it allowable to use a motor vehicle for the sole purpose of attending the synagogue. They considered it more important to express their faith by being able to get to the synagogue, rather than be forced to stay home. Ammerman in her 1997 book states that “Orthodox Jewish synagogues encourage proximity because of rules against travel on the Sabbath” (Ammerman 1997, 35).

4.3. Demographic Analysis

There has been a large amount of research on the demographic breakdown of church congregations. According to Roof (1976) “among the many social correlates of religious commitment, four have probably received more attention in empirical research than any others:

social class, sex, age, and generation” (195). Some of the other common factors under study include marital status, the presence of children in the household, race, regional and denominational differences, and education and income. Iannacone and Everton (2004) summarized some overarching themes in demographic religious research, such as “women, blacks, married couples and older people are all relatively frequent churchgoers” (198). This analysis will compare the findings of previous research to the demographics of the two mega churches under study, and explain the similarities and differences.

4.3.1. Age

Contradicting results arose in past research regarding the age factor. Some researchers demonstrated that as compared to younger people, more senior adults attend church, and that those senior adults who attend, do so more frequently, specifically “that beyond age 35, there is a steady increase in religious activity until old age” (Roof 1976, 196). According to Bell, “Erskine ... reports a greater interest in religion for individuals 50 years of age and older” (Bell 1971, 57). Bell hypothesized that “the Family Life Cycle is a more satisfactory predictor of church participation than chronological age”, but concluded contrary to his hypothesis that chronological age is a more significant factor (Bell 1971, 57). Bell speculated that since the family life cycle variable is very complex, further research is needed to understand it fully. According to Finney and Lee, the reason of increased religious commitment with age is the “potential for alleviating anxiety among older persons and because other avenues of social involvement become less available to people as they age” (Finney and Lee 1977, 174). Finney and Lee differentiate between belief, church attendance, financial contributions to church, and saying grace at meals. Although they hypothesized differently, they conclude that “age is positively related to church attendance, evening church participation, church financial

contributions, and saying grace at meals” (Finney and Lee 1977, 177). Opposing research indicates a “steady decline in religious participation with age” (Smith, Denton, Faris, Regnerus 2002, 605).

Age data was available for both FBCW and NPCC, therefore both churches will be included in this part of the analysis. The hypothesis for the age variable includes three parts:

1. There are more young people at NPCC than there are at FBCW.
2. There are more young people at NPCC than there are in the general population.

FBCW has almost 16% children between the ages of 1 and 12, as compared to a much higher percentage of 40% at NPCC. Both churches have a similar number of adolescents between ages 13 and 18, with almost 12% at FBCW and slightly more than 10% at NPCC. FBCW has almost 19% 19-30 year olds, whereas NPCC only has 13% in that age group. Almost 35% of FBCW’s membership is made up of 31 to 50 year olds, as compared to 31% at NPCC. FBCW has a significantly higher percentage of people age 51 and above, with more 15% between the ages of 51 and 65 and almost 4% of people above 66. NPCC only has 6% of 51 to 65 year olds, and less than 1% of people over 66.

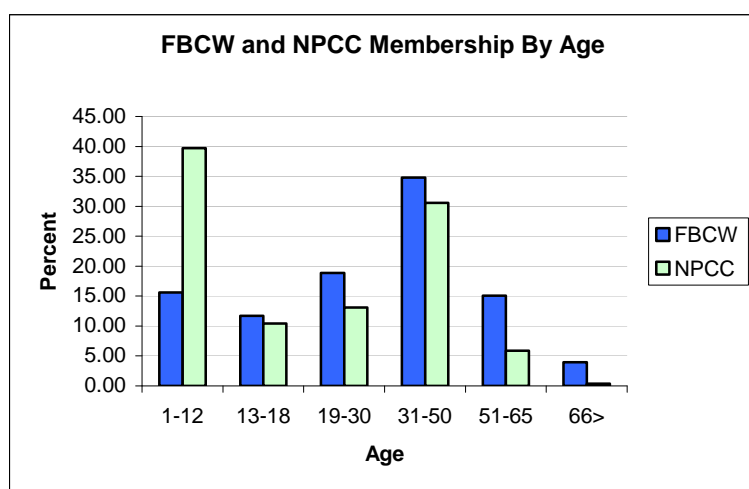


Figure 29: FBCW and NPCC Membership By Age

The most significant differences in the age categories at FBCW and NPCC are visible in the 1 to 12 year age group, the 19-30 year olds, and the age group of 51 and higher. The age groups of 13-18 and 31-50 are very similar for both of the churches. NPCC has more than twice the number of 1-12 year old children than FBCW. NPCC is known for extensive children's programming, which is very interactive and innovative. NPCC "is widely recognized as having one of the most creative children's and family ministries going" (Generation Next Website 2005). There are several age-specific environments for children at NPCC, starting with the preschool program called Waumba Land, to the Upstreet program for K1 through K5, then InnerMission and Extreme for Middle schoolers, and InsideOut for High schoolers. NPCC places a high emphasis on small groups, starting with the youngest age groups. The before mentioned children's programs are based on the small group concept. The volunteers working in these groups are small group leaders who are assigned to specific groups of children. There may be 10-15 children per class, with 3 small group leaders, one adult per 3 to 5 children. Rather than having a teacher-student relationship, the small group is a safe environment for the children and teenagers to interact with the small group leaders.

NPCC also has a program called KidStuf, which is a weekly event targeting children and their parents. "It's a 'family-centered' ministry that requires parental involvement" (Stanley, Young 2002, 48). At many churches, there is the perception that the parents have to drag the children to church. Based on NPCC attenders' comments, when a child visits with a friend and the friend's parents, the child may go home and ask his or her parents to go with them the following week. KidStuf was developed by NPCC staff members, but is now also being introduced at other churches.

FBCW uses the traditional Sunday School class for children, as well as adults. FBCW has a preschool, an elementary school, middle school and high school ministry, with Sunday School classes. Sunday School is a teaching environment with an adult teacher who generally stands up in front of the students.

Another noticeable difference in the age variable is the 19-30 range. FBCW has 31% more persons in that age range. Andy Stanley explains a pattern he has noticed at NPCC: “probably 40% of those who attend on a given Sunday morning abandoned church after high school or during college. Now they are getting married or they are in their late twenties. Their life is empty. They are giving church another try” (Stanley 2005). The 19-30 year olds match the description of those people who would have stopped attending church after high school or during college. Another possible explanation is that single adults are underrepresented in NPCC’s database, because NPCC does not place a high emphasis on turning attenders into members. Unless an attender has signed up for an event, or provides his or her address when contributing money to the church, he or she may never be recorded in the database. Families with children are more likely entered in the database, since they have to register their children for the various children’s programs. Also NPCC hosts an interdenominational singles program that meets on Tuesday nights. It is called 7:22 and affiliated with NPCC, but not limited to NPCC members and attenders. It draws an average of 3,000 singles from 350 churches and campuses each week. Another 6,000 singles watch the program on the internet each week (7:22 Website 2005). Each week, the 7:22 program includes a musical worship time and a message by a speaker called Louie Giglio. Some single adults may attend 7:22 on Tuesday nights instead of going to church on Sunday mornings.

The other noticeable difference between FBCW and NPCC is the higher percentage of older persons (age 51 and above) at FBCW. NPCC has only 7% of persons in this category compared to FBCW's 19%. NPCC has a contemporary worship style and music, compared to FBCW's more traditional choir and organ music and Johnny Hunt's traditional Baptist sermons. Attending a service at NPCC reminds more of a rock concert than a church service. NPCC does not have a choir or an organ. NPCC's worship band uses electric guitars, and drums. They play contemporary Christian music, as well as some secular songs. The difference may also be explained by the fact that FBCW is an older church, and the older people who now attend FBCW might have started attending a long time ago and continue attending.

When comparing the age breakdown of FBCW and NPCC to the general population in the core impact census tracts, there are significant differences. FBCW compared to the general population has fewer children under the age of 9, is very similar between the ages of 10 and 14, has more teenagers and young adults between the ages of 15 and 24, fewer adults between 25 and 44, slightly more adults aged 45 to 49, fewer 51 through 54 year olds, more 55 to 64 year olds, and slightly fewer senior adults between the ages of 65 and above. It is difficult to discern a pattern of these differences, beyond the fact that FBCW has fewer young children than expected, but that it appeals to teenagers and young adults.

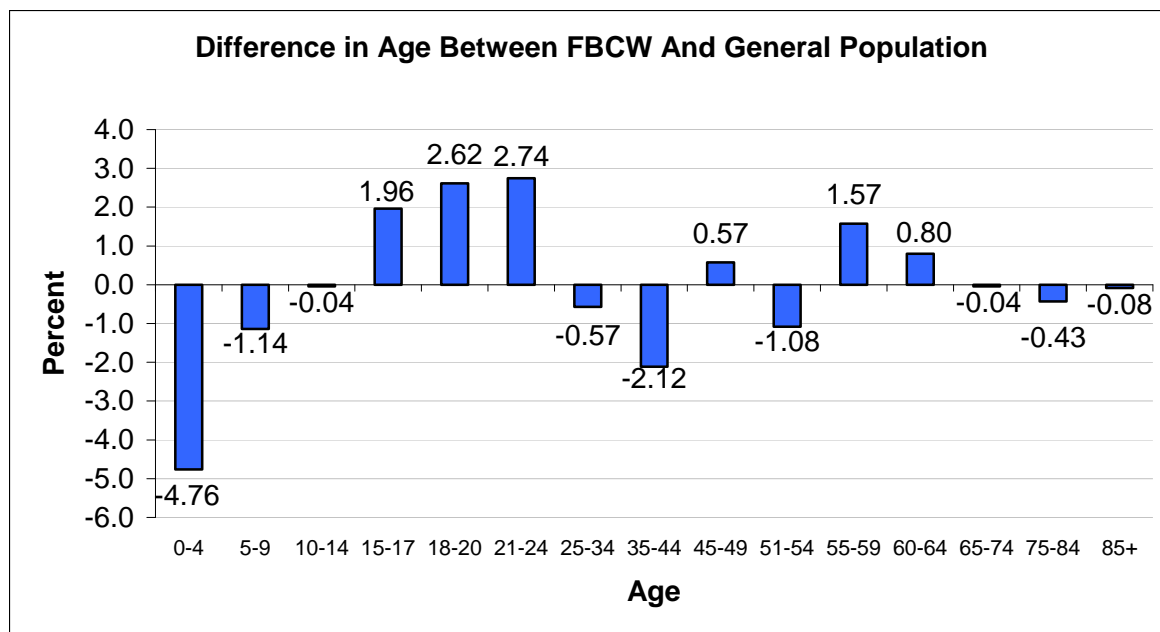


Figure 30: Age For FBCW and General Population

The pattern is more consistent for the NPCC age breakdown to the general population. There are significantly more young children and teenagers between infants and age 17 at NPCC. There is a slight dip for 18 to 20 year olds, then there are slightly more 21 through 34 year olds than in the general population. The numbers for 35 through 85 year olds and above show that there are fewer people in that age range at NPCC than in the general population.

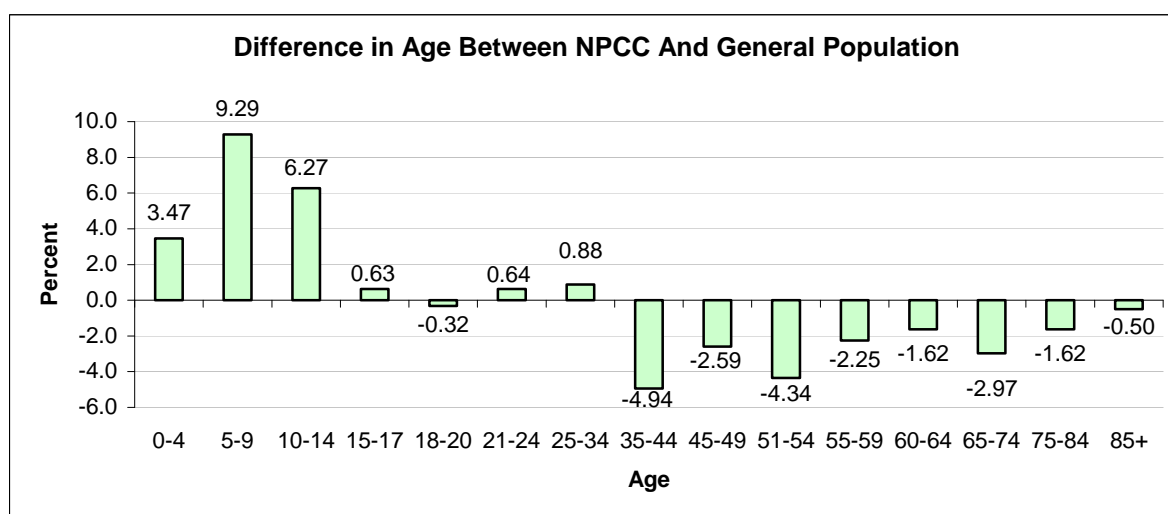


Figure 31: Age for NPCC and General Population

For the age variable, both hypotheses were confirmed.

4.3.2. Gender

Past research on the gender factor in church membership generally demonstrated that more women attend church. Those women who attend church, do so more frequently than men. Bultena states that “the majority of the church members are women” (Bultena 1949, 384), and Smith, Denton, Faris and Regnerus (2002) conclude that “adult American women consistently score higher on cost measures of religiosity than adult men” (605). Mueller and Johnson (1975) find that “it is generally held, for example, that because of role expectations or social marginality, females participate more frequently than males” (788), and Roof summarizes that “women are more religious than men” (Roof 1976, 196).

Since the gender attribute for NPCC was not available, this part of the analysis will be limited to FBCW. The hypothesis for the gender variable includes three parts:

1. There are more women than men at FBCW.
2. There are more women at FBCW than there are in the general population.
3. There are fewer women at FBCW than has been shown in previous demographic church studies.

Considering the FBCW members over age 18, there are more women (53%) than men (47%). Since the data does not include frequency of attendance, it is not known whether the women who attend FBCW attend more frequently than the men in the congregation. Churches only record attendance as a total number of attenders on a given Sunday, and do not record gender or any other demographic factors. A survey would be required to establish whether women at FBCW attend more frequently than men. The church database does not include information about whether the person is part of the labor force, therefore it is not possible to test whether that factor has an effect on the FBCW membership.

The general population has an almost even ratio of men and women. There are 50.14% of women compared to 49.86% of men. When comparing the FBCW gender ratio to the male-female ratio of the general population of the core impact census tracts, there is a higher percentage of women at FBCW than there is in the general population.

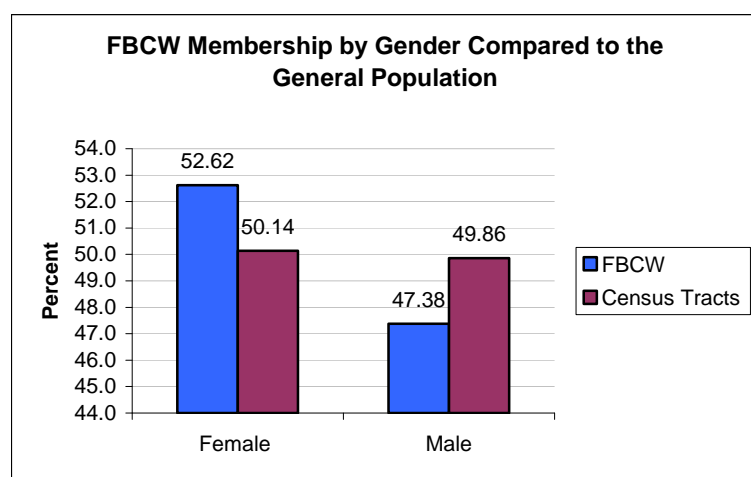


Figure 32: Gender for FBCW and General Population

Previous studies gave evidence of an even higher participation of women in religious activities than the FBCW membership. DeVaus (1984) cited a 57% higher regular church attendance by women than by men (249). Lenski (1953) found “sixty per cent more women than men expressed ‘much’ interest in religion since marriage” (535). Lenski argued that the difference in church attendance can be explained by participation in the labor force. Lenski’s article was written in 1953, when fewer women were working outside the home. Lazerwitz (1961), however, argued that the labor force argument is not valid, since according to his statistics, there was no difference in church attendance between women who are in the labor force and those who are not (303). According to Lazerwitz, 54% of employed men attended church either regularly or often, compared to 45% of men who were not in the labor force. 71% of employed women attended church regularly or often, compared to 69% women who were not in the labor force (Lazerwitz 1961, 303). DeVaus agreed with Lazerwitz and added to the

argument against the labor force participation that “since 1947 female participation in the workforce has increased markedly but the over-representation of women in churches has not declined” (DeVaus 1984, 249). The church membership data may not address the gender factor very well, especially for couples. It is possible that the entire family is enrolled at FBCW, but that the woman attends more frequently than her husband. This factor may be analyzed more thoroughly with attendance frequency data by gender, or a survey. Based on the available data, the three hypotheses for the gender factor were confirmed.

4.3.3. Marital Status

Past research indicates that married couples are more likely to attend church as compared to singles, and that those married couples who attend, attend church more frequently. Robert Putnam (2000) found that “generally speaking, marriage and children encourage greater involvement in church activities” (73). The marital status data was only available for FBCW, so this part of the analysis will be limited to FBCW. Only adults over 18 are considered for this segment. The hypotheses for the marital status variable are:

1. There are more married adults than single adults at FBCW.
2. There are more married adults at FBCW than there are in the general population.

FBCW has 59% married adults, 31% singles, 7% divorced, and 2% widowed persons, which confirms the first hypothesis that there is a higher percentage of married adults as compared to single adults. Compared to the general population, the second hypothesis is rejected, since there are more married persons in the general population than there are at FBCW. There are almost 11% more singles at FBCW than there are in the general population. These numbers are surprising and suggest that more research is needed to examine the appeal of mega churches on singles. Many churches have an active singles ministry with many social events.

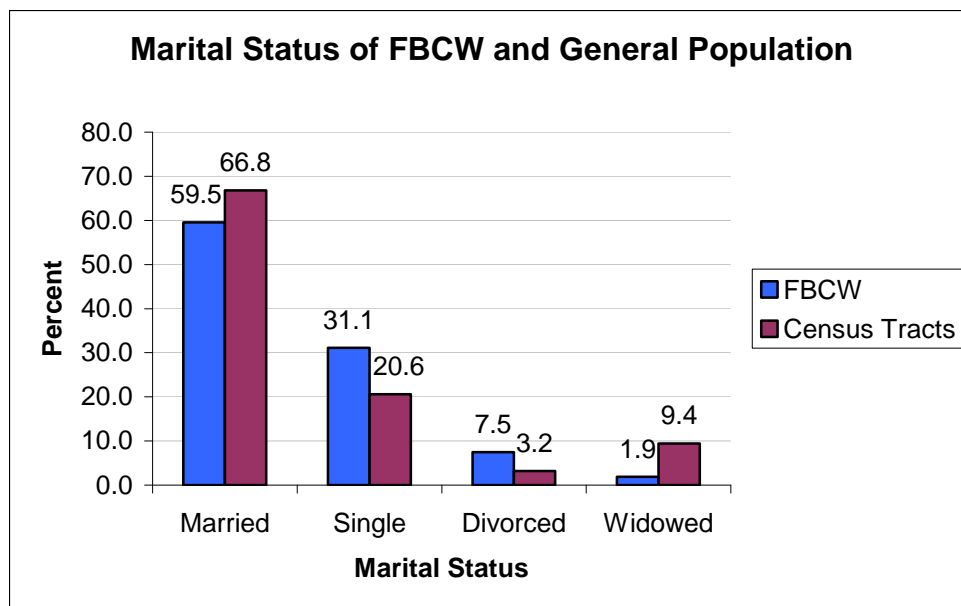


Figure 33: Marital Status of FBCW and General Population

On first glance, if the marital status is combined with the gender factor the results are more significant than isolating gender. Based on the FBCW church members, the following hypothesis will be examined: There is a much higher representation of divorced and widowed women at FBCW than there are divorced and widowed men. For married couples over age 18, the gender breakdown of the general population is almost identical to the gender breakdown of the congregation: 52% female to 48% male. For the singles in the congregation, the gender breakdown differs with fewer females (only 48%) and more males (almost 52%). That means that the proportion of male singles in the congregation is higher than the proportion of female singles, and higher than the proportion of married men. The numbers for the divorced and widowed church members differ very significantly from the overall gender breakdown. Females comprise 64% of the divorced members and 86% of the widowed members, compared to 36% and 14% respectively, for males.

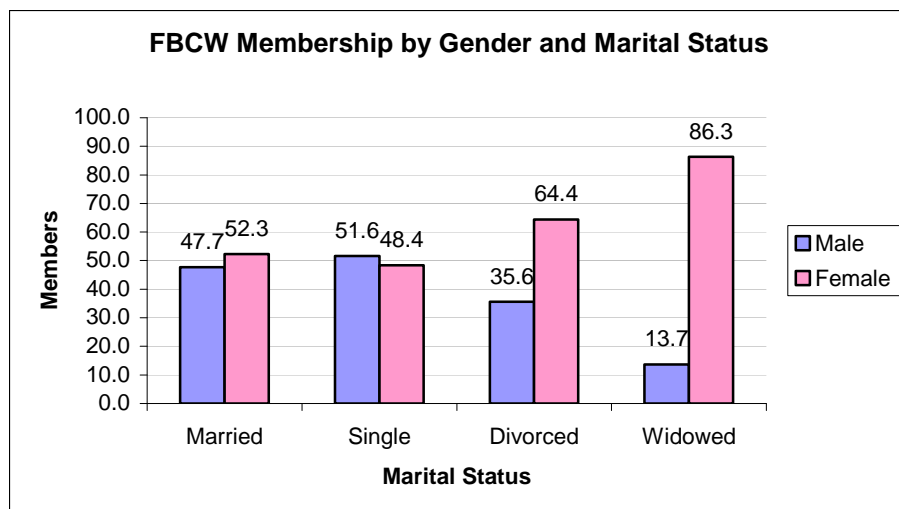


Figure 34: FBCW Membership By Gender and Marital Status

When compared to the general population, FBCW's marital status in combination with the gender variable is more in line with the general population than first expected. FBCW has 2.5% fewer male married persons than the general population, and 5.4% fewer male single adults than their representation in the general population. There are more divorced women than there are divorced men in the general population and at FBCW. There are 3.3% more divorced women at FBCW than there are in the general population. There are 4.1% more widowed women at FBCW than in the general population. Many of the previous demographic studies were conducted in the 1950s, 60s, and 70s. Since the gender roles in the U.S. population have changed significantly since then, it would be interesting to repeat these studies. A gender and marital status comparison between church members and the general population would be more representative, if it were based on frequency of attendance, rather than the church membership database, since past research found a significantly higher attendance rate of women compared to men.

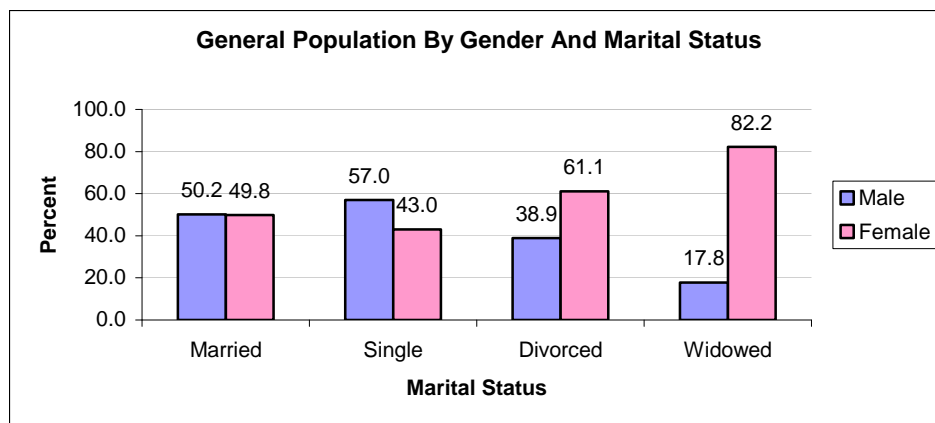


Figure 35: General Population By Gender and Marital Status

Data supplied by figure 34 confirmed the hypothesis that there are more divorced and widowed women than men at FBCW. However, the difference between divorced and widowed women as compared to married and single women very closely mimics the demographics of the general population.

4.3.4. Number of Children in Household

Some researchers combine the marital status with the presence of children in the household, since it is believed that many couples start attending church only after they have children. Lenski (1953) found that only 21.7% of people without children express “much” interest in religion, compared to 32.3% of people with one or more children (536). Lenski explained that when facing “the problem of transmitting the cultural heritage to the children” (536), parents turn to the church. Lazerwitz (1961), however, concluded that “the presence of varying numbers of children in the home does not appear to be associated with meaningful variations in church attendance” (305).

When comparing the household composition of FBCW members and NPCC members, there are similar proportions of single adults without children at both churches. However, there are significant differences in the categories of “2 Adults – No Children”, “1 Child – No Adults”, and “2 Children – No Adults”. FBCW’s congregation consists of more than 20% married

households without children, compared to less than 10% at NPCC. It is possible that NPCC is undercounted in this category due to married adults without children not having to register for their children's programs. The categories of 1 and 2 children without adults are more highly represented at NPCC. This household composition probably occurs when a child attends without a parent present in the children's program. Again, the appeal of NPCC's children's programming explains the higher proportion in this category. The category of "1 Adult with Children" is very represented at similar proportions at both churches. In the category of "2 Adults with children" FBCW has almost 4% more than NPCC does. It is not clear why FBCW has a slightly higher appeal to married couples with children, than NPCC does.

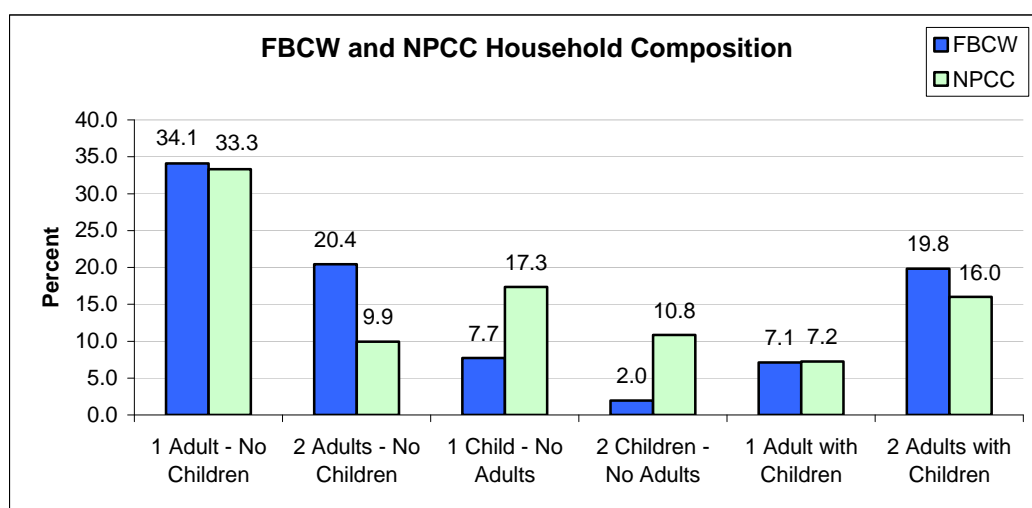


Figure 36: FBCW and NPCC Household Composition

Because the gender variable is not available for NPCC linked to an address, this part of the analysis will be limited to FBCW. When comparing the household composition of FBCW to the household composition of the general population in the surrounding census tracts, there are significant differences in all four categories. FBCW has more persons in single households, for both male and female householders, than the general population. Proportionally, there are more 1-Person Households with female householders than with male householders for both FBCW and

the general population. FBCW has a lower percentage of married couples with children, as well as a lower percentage of married couples without children when compared to the general population. Since the general population has a higher proportion of married couples with children under 18 (45.5%) compared to couples without children (36.8%), FBCW is underrepresented significantly in the category of married couples with children with only 26.6%.

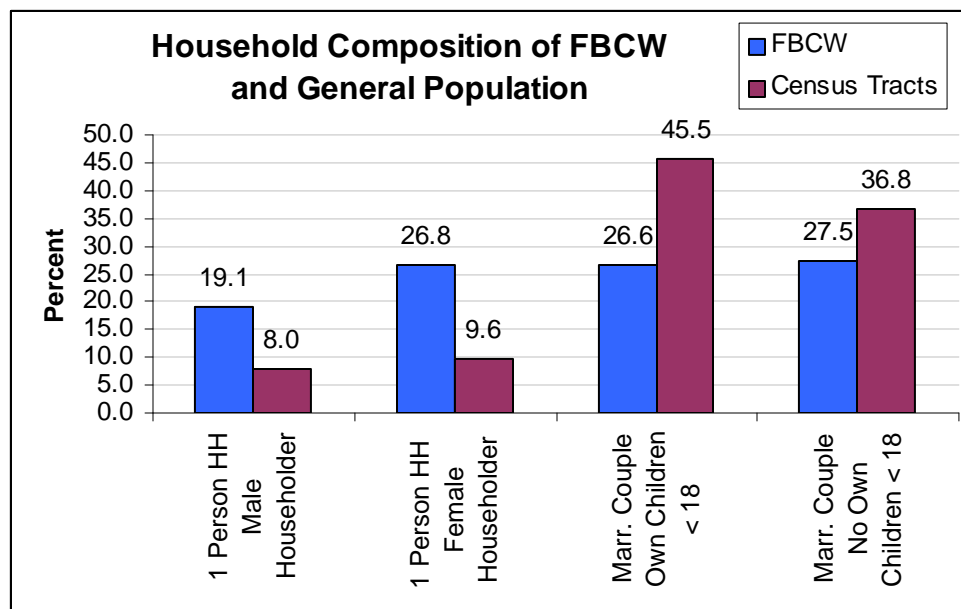


Figure 37: Household Composition of FBCW and General Population

4.3.5. Status

Research results about the effects of income and education on religious behavior differ. Iannaccone, Finke and Stark (1997) noted that “survey studies in the U.S. and Europe find that income and education are weak, but generally positive, predictors of church attendance” (8). Mueller and Johnson (1975) studied marital status and presence of children in conjunction with education and conclude that “the more highly educated married-with-children participate more than the less highly educated married-with-children” (798). Some researchers, however, do not consider status an important factor in religiosity. Bultena (1949) concluded that “equal proportions from the various social-economic classes belong to churches and their average

attendances do not differ significantly” (386). According to Mueller and Johnson (1975) “socioeconomic status, ..., is not an important determinant of religious participation” (798). Mueller and Johnson (1975) found a positive correlation between occupational level and church participation, but no correlation between educational level and church participation. (786). Many researchers find that the middle-class is more likely to be religious. Roof (1976) generalized that “middle-class people generally tend to participate more in organizations and thus are more inclined to become affiliated with, and involved in, religious groups” (196). Dodson (1959) suggested a middle class domination of the churches. “The studies of social class show that the churches are pretty much supported and run by the middle class” (368). Goode (1966) equalized the higher proportion of the middle-class in the church by posing that the middle class shows a higher participation in church, as well as non-church activity (108).

Research shows differences in status not only between church members and non-church members, but also between members of different religious groups. Gockel (1969) examined whether “constituents of some religious bodies have higher social status than other religious groups” (632). He used education, occupation, religion, race, region and size of place as the independent variables to explain the difference in income amongst thirteen different religious groups. He concluded that most of the difference in status can be explained by the difference in education and occupation, rather than by membership in the religious group (632). Jackson, Fox, and Crockett (1970) studied the status differences while equalizing several factors, such as the father’s occupation, ethnic background and race, generation of immigration and age, a Southern heritage and having grown up in a rural area. They concluded that “Protestants are more likely than Catholics of the same occupational origin to enter professional and business occupations. Catholics are more likely than Protestants of the same origin to enter white-collar occupations.

Protestants are more often sharply upwardly mobile; Catholics are more often sharply downwardly mobile” (60).

There is no data available for FBCW and NPCC indicating the socio-economic status of their congregations. This part of the analysis will be limited to socio-economic factors of the core impact census tracts. The factors included in the analysis for the status variable are income, education, and occupation type. The author speculates that the status of the people living in the core impact areas around the two mega churches under study are higher than the status of the Georgia and the U.S. population. The median per capita and household income in the core impact areas is higher than the median income in all of Georgia. The NPCC core census tracts have higher income levels than the FBCW core census tracts.

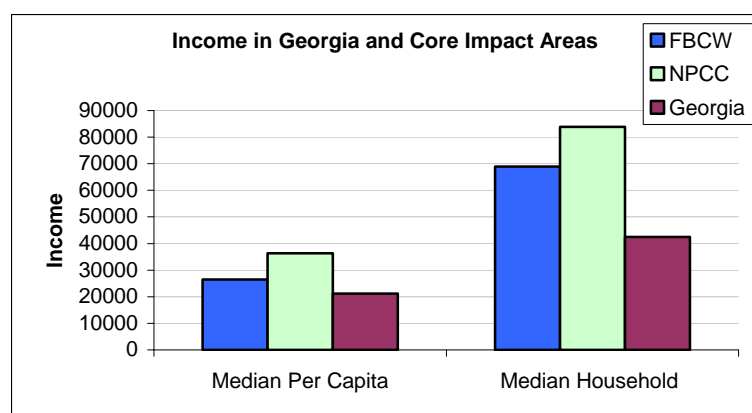


Figure 38: Income of General Population

There are significant differences of educational attainment between the FBCW and the NPCC core impact areas. The general population in the FBCW core census tracts is more likely to have an education less than 9th grade, some high school and only a high school diploma. There are more people in the FBCW core census tracts with some college education, but no degree, or an Associate degree. There are significantly fewer people with a Bachelor's degree or a graduate or professional degree in FBCW's core impact area than there in NPCC's. NPCC's population has 19% more persons with a Bachelor's or advanced degree than the FBCW population. Both

FBCW's and NPCC's populations have at least as high or higher educational attainments than the Georgia average and the U.S. average across all educational levels.

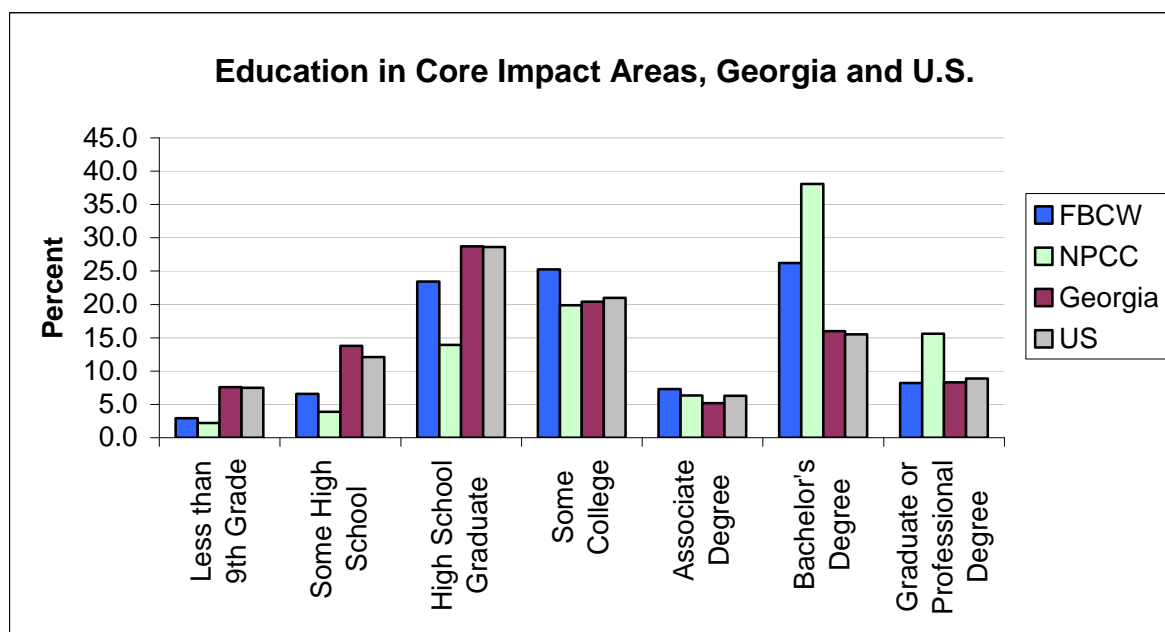


Figure 39: Education of Core Impact Areas, Georgia and U.S.

Considering the occupation type of the general population in each of the core impact areas, almost 83% of the people in the NPCC core impact area work in white-collar occupations, compared to less than 71% in the FBCW core impact area. NPCC has 10% blue-collar persons, compared to FBCW's 18%. Service and farm occupations account for the remainder, with 7% for NPCC and almost 11% for FBCW.

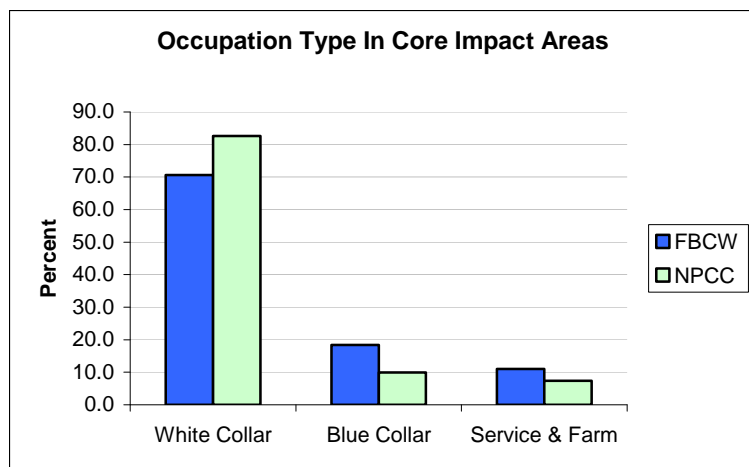


Figure 40: Occupation Type in Core Impact Areas

4.3.6. Race

Previous research has shown a correlation between race and religiosity. “Race affects religious participation in adolescents” (Smith, Denton, Faris, Regnerus 2002, 606-7). Putnam (2000) also found that “blacks continue to be more religiously observant than whites” (76). There is no data available from FBCW and NPCC indicating the race or ethnic background of their congregations, but it is evident when attending the two churches, that they are predominantly white congregations. Considering the racial composition of the core impact area for each church, FBCW has a slightly higher percentage of white persons in its core impact area. FBCW and NPCC have a similar percentage of black persons, with 4.9% in the FBCW core impact area, and 4.5% in the NPCC core impact area. NPCC has a slightly higher proportion of Asian persons in its core impact area. Indians, Pacific Islanders, and others and persons of two or more races are each represented with less than 2% in both core impact areas. When compared to the racial composition of the Georgia and the U.S. population, FBCW’s and NPCC’s core impact populations have a higher ratio of white persons, and fewer black persons. The NPCC population has a slightly higher percentage of Asians.

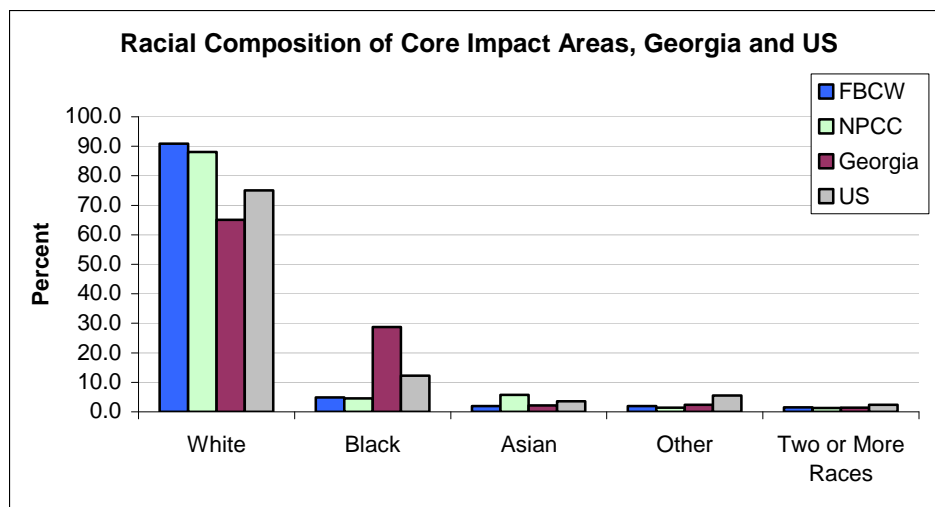


Figure 41: Racial Composition of Core Impact Areas, Georgia and U.S.

Many Hispanics are Catholic, and therefore a high percentage of Hispanics in an area, and a high in-migration of Hispanics will lead to higher membership rates of Catholic churches. “By some estimates, for example, Hispanics now constitute one-quarter of American Catholics” (Putnam 2000, 76). Some estimates are as high as 39% (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops Website 2005). The FBCW core impact area has 4.72% percent Hispanic persons compared to NPCC’s 4.08% percent. Both of these numbers are slightly lower than the 5.32% at the Georgia level, and significantly lower than the 14.02% at the national level. The percentage of Hispanic persons in the FBCW core census tracts range between 2% and 12%, whereas the NPCC core census tracts range from 1.8% to 11.08%. The increased number of Hispanics who live in the Atlanta suburbs will either lead to an increased membership in Catholic churches, or it will cause Protestant churches to target Hispanics, with programs such as English as a second language classes, or Spanish speaking ministers. FBCW has a Spanish church, with a Spanish-speaking pastor, and Sunday school classes in Spanish, as well as English as a second language classes. NPCC does not have any programs specifically geared towards Hispanics.

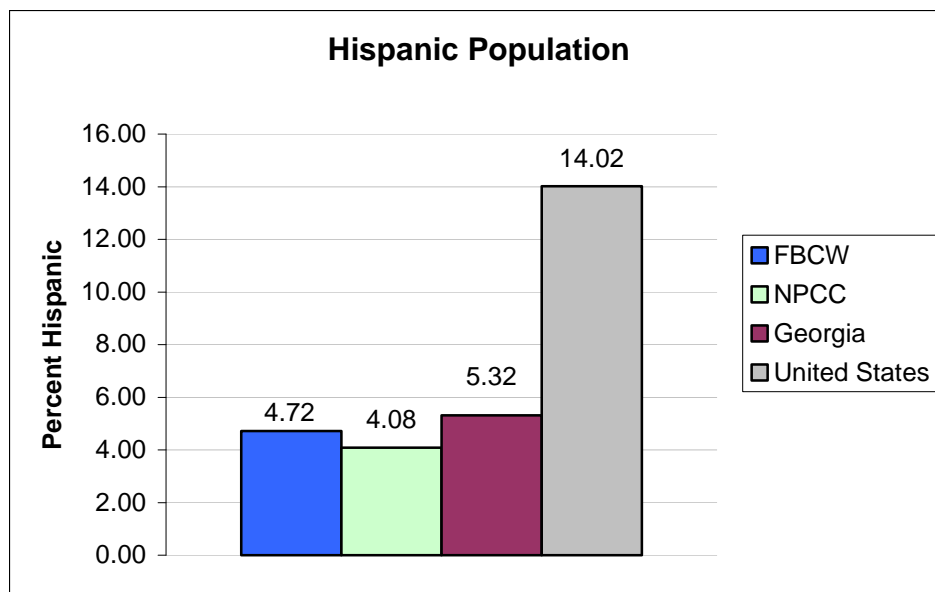


Figure 42: Hispanic Population Percentage of Core Impact Areas, Georgia and U.S.

4.4. Factors for choosing a specific church

An important consideration of this analysis is what people are looking for when choosing a church. If all churches were alike, then there would be no reason not to go to the closest one. A survey (American Religion Data Archive 2003) conducted in 2002, later used in a PBS documentary and a U.S. News & World Report article, asked the participants to select those factors which were most important to them when choosing a church. The choices included beliefs, doctrines and creeds, denomination, sense of community, educational and children's programs, the minister, priest or rabbi, the location of the church, and the small group meetings. The results of the survey were presented for the general population, as well as by demographic factors such as gender, age, and religious affiliation. The general population placed the most importance (30%) on the beliefs, doctrines and creeds of the church. The sense of community and the denomination contributed almost 20% each. The minister, priest or rabbi and the educational and children's program contributed 13% each. The location was only important to 4% of the respondents. The fact that the location factor received such a low percentage of the

responses emphasizes the willingness to drive a long distance to get to church. The small group meetings had the least responses with only 2%. When analyzing the results by gender, there are hardly any differences. None of the factors diverge more than 2% between the male and the female respondents.

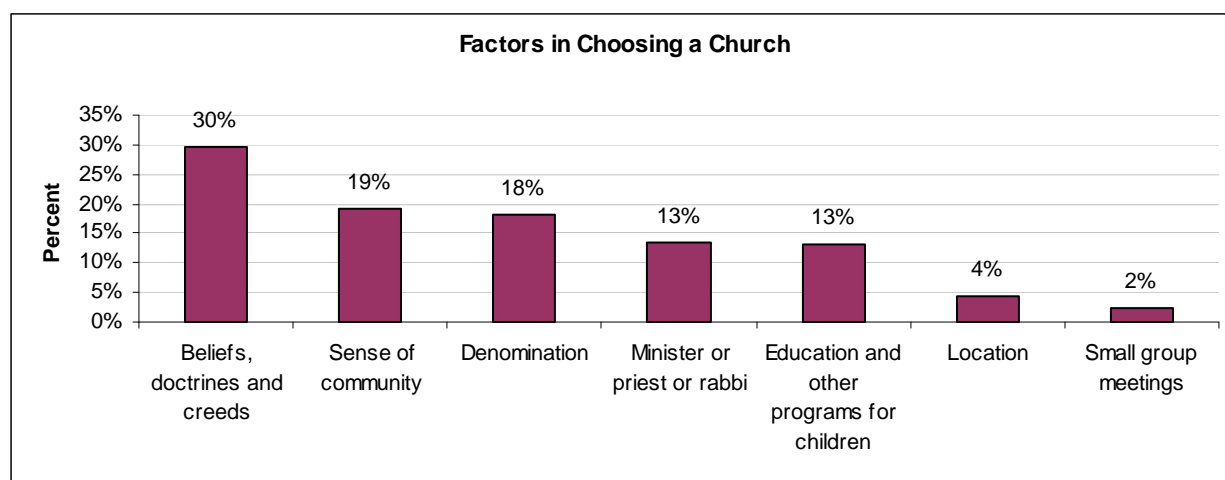


Figure 43: Factors in Choosing a Church (American Religion Data Archive 2003)

The age of the respondents provides more diverse answers. The beliefs, doctrines and creeds are less important to the 35-44 year olds and the persons above 65 than any other age group. The sense of community is most important to the 35-44 year olds. The denomination is least important for the youngest age group and most important for the oldest. The minister, rabbi or priest is least important to the oldest age group. The location is by far the most important to the 18-34 year olds.

The religious affiliation of the respondents shows even greater differences. For the Jewish respondents, the beliefs, doctrines and creeds were not a significant factor in choosing a place of worship. The sense of community, however is the most important factor for the Jewish participants, almost twice as important as it is to the other respondents. The denomination of the church is most important to the Catholics. The location of the church is most important to the Jewish respondents, followed by the Catholics (American Religion Data Archive 2003).

Based on the factors mentioned above, what do FBCW and NPCC offer to their members and attenders that other churches do not? What appeals to people so much that they will choose to commute to church, rather than attend the local neighborhood church? The following table includes each of the factors, and additional elements, which contribute to the effectiveness of FBCW and NPCC.

Table 2: Comparison of FBCW and NPCC

	FBCW	NPCC
Beliefs, doctrines, creeds	Conservative	Conservative
Denomination	Southern Baptist Convention	Non-Denominational
Education and other programs for children	Yes, extensive, Sunday School classes	Yes, small group setting as well as larger group programs
Minister or priest or rabbi	Dr. Johnny Hunt	Andy Stanley
Location	Highly Accessible; Off Hwy 92	Highly Accessible; Close to GA 400
Small group meetings	No	Yes
Sunday School	Yes	No
Worship Elements:		
Music	Baptist Traditional	Contemporary
Preaching	Bible Study	Practical Application, topical
Altar Call	Yes	No
Treatment of Visitors	Asked to stand at the beginning of the service	Not singled out; can pick up a free CD at the information desk
Visitor Parking	Yes	No
Reception with Pastor after Service	Yes	No
Building Style	More ornate; big cross on the center of the building	Simple; like a mall or a warehouse
Advertising	Yes. Direct mailings to certain zip codes	No. Solely word of mouth.
Use of Internet:		
Website	Yes	Yes
Sermons Online	Yes	Yes
Other functionality		Order Event Tickets

Spanish Ministry	Yes	No
Deaf Ministry	Yes	Yes
Activities:		
Sunday Morning Service	1	3 at main campus, 5 at Buckhead
Sunday Evening Service	Yes	No
Wednesday Evening Service	Yes	No
Choir Practice	Yes	No
ESL Classes	Yes	No
Prison Ministry	Yes	No
Women's Ministry	Yes	No
Divorce Classes	Yes	Yes
Premarital Counseling	Yes	Yes
Pastoral Counseling	Yes	Yes
Gym	Yes	No
Library	Yes	No
Bookstore	No	Yes
Thrift Store	Yes	No
Café	Yes (serves lunch Mon-Thurs)	No
Visitation	Yes	No

The beliefs, doctrines and creeds of FBCW and NPCC are similar to each other. They are traditional and conservative in their theological outlook. NPCC does not cover each of the doctrines in their summary statement of faith, but when attending NPCC and listening to Andy Stanley's sermons, the doctrines that are not explicitly stated appear to be similar to FBCW. Both churches believe that God is the creator of the universe, exists in three persons (the trinity), and created mankind. Jesus is the Son of God, and the second person in the trinity. The Bible is inspired by God, and absolutely accurate. By placing his or her faith in Jesus, a person can be saved. The church is the body of Christ, a local body of believers, and exists to glorify God.

Table 3: Beliefs, Doctrines and Creeds of FBCW and NPCC (FBCW 2005c; NPCC 2005e)

	FBCW	NPCC
God	Creator and Ruler of the universe, exists in three persons: the Father, the Son, and Holy Spirit	One God who exists in three distinct persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
Jesus	Jesus Christ is the Son of God; He is co-equal with the Father	Jesus Christ is the second member of the Trinity (the Son of God)
Holy Spirit	Third person of the Trinity	
Bible	Inspired by God; the supreme source of truth for Christian beliefs and living	Inspired Word of God; the Bible is without error
Human Beings	People are made in the image of God; sin separates people from God and causes many problems in life	Mankind was created in the image of God to have fellowship with Him but became alienated in that relationship through sinful disobedience
Salvation	God's free gift to us; by trusting Jesus Christ	Occurs only when a person places his or her faith in Christ
The Church	A local body of baptized believers; to observe two ordinances: baptism and the Lord's Supper	The body of Christ; the purpose of the church is to glorify God
Baptism	By immersion, a symbol of salvation	By immersion, a symbol of salvation
The Lord's Supper	Symbolic act remembering the death of Jesus and anticipating His second coming	Same as FBCW. Not explicitly stated in their statement of faith, but in various sermons
Evangelism	The duty of every Christian and every church	Same as FBCW. Not explicitly stated in their statement of faith, but in various sermons
Tithing	Ten percent of gross income	Same as FBCW. Not explicitly stated in their statement of faith, but in various sermons

The sense of community is arguably the factor that people may suspect is missing at a mega church. How can thousands of people in rows in a big sanctuary feel community? According to Dougherty (2004, 117), "no tasks are more important for congregations than the provision of meaning and belonging". Dodson (1959) found that identification is a more important factor than deepening spiritual commitment. "A recent study showed that 30% of church members gave social reasons for joining, 26% said "for the sake of the children", and 22% said "for spiritual reasons" (Dodson 1959, 367). Diamond also realized the significance of the social aspect. This social aspect is especially important in the suburbs of a sprawling

metropolis like Atlanta with high amounts of population increase and migration. A recent New York Times article featured an Alpharetta family, who are profiled as a typical “relo” family. They have moved several times in the last ten years due to the husband’s job transfers. For families like the Links, “there is little in the way of small-town ties or big-city amenities – grandparents and cousins, longtime neighbors, vibrant boulevards, homegrown shops – that let roots sink in deep” (Kilborn 2005). Rootless families like the Links may attend church to meet people and make friends in their new community.

“The fact that people travel across the city to attend a particular worship service suggests that religion is highly relevant to individual lives. People care about where and with whom they worship. If they did not, the logic of time and distance suggests they would simply go to the nearest church. Though spatially dispersed, congregations house socially connected worshippers and thus serve as important social centers in an otherwise centerless metropolis” (Diamond 1999).

The foremost mentioned characteristic of a vibrant church is the sense of community. Wuthnow (1993) poses that “the church of the twenty-first century, like that of previous centuries, will probably remain vibrant as long as it can provide people with a strong sense of community” (32). He concedes that it is difficult for churches to impart this sense of community, because a church “brings people together once a week, drawing them from broad geographic areas, and expects them to forge some kind of intimate bond when they probably will not see each other again for seven days” (214).

There are two possible applications of these findings to mega churches. Either mega churches do not provide that social aspect, that sense of community, and mega church members and attenders do not place a high emphasis on social reasons when choosing a church, or the mega churches, although they are very big and on first glance may not address that social need, they actually do. The author argues that the two churches under study both provide environments, in which the social reasons for choosing a church are fulfilled very well. Rick

Warren, author of the popular book *A Purpose Driven Life* states that “it is a myth that you must know everyone in the church in order to feel like a part of a church. The average church member knows 67 people in the congregation, whether the church has 200 or 2,000 attending” (Warren 2003). At a mega church, however, where an attender may never sit next to the same person on a given Sunday, it would be very difficult to get to know 67 people, unless a smaller group component, such as Sunday School classes or small groups are available. A recent survey of mega churches asked whether the church felt like a close-knit family. More than 10% said that the description of a close-knit family matched their church very well, 37.4% said it matched quite well, 38.2% said it somewhat matched, 10.7% said it only slightly matched, and only 3.1% did not agree with the close-knit family description (Thumma 2005).

FBCW has an active Sunday School ministry, with almost 90% of their members enrolled in a Sunday School class. On an average Sunday, more than 70% of worshippers also go to Sunday School. FBCW, like many Southern Baptist churches, places a high emphasis on the Sunday School ministry. Sunday School classes generally consist of 10 to 25 or even more persons, who are similar in age. Sunday School classes meet before, during or after the Sunday morning church service. Small churches may only have one Sunday School class for each age range. Bigger churches have a complex Sunday School department with hundreds of different classes, where people can choose between different teachers and study topics. Some Sunday School departments have a larger group meeting for a prayer and social time, and then split into the individual classes for the study time. A Sunday School class is generally taught by a teacher, who has prepared the material and presents it to the class. Many teachers encourage class interaction and discussion. Sunday School members may have specific roles, such as greeter, or care team member. The care teams provide an additional support system, when people are sick or

experience hardship. In a class of 20 adults, a quiet person may go unnoticed one week, but the care teams ensure that individual attention and accountability exist. Research has shown that the long-term commitment of a church member, who is part of a Sunday School class compared to a church member, who only attends the worship service is five times as high (Rainer 2005). Table 4 shows the recommended enrollment ceilings for Sunday School classes (The Sunday School Page 1999).

Table 4: Recommended Enrollment Ceilings in Sunday School Classes

Age Group	Enrollment Ceiling
Birth to 1-year-olds	12
Toddlers	12
Twos	15
Threes, fours, and fives	20
Youth classes	10-15
Adult classes	25

NPCC has an active small group or community group ministry. A small group ministry is generally only successful if the pastor and the church leadership fully support it through words and actions. Andy Stanley highly promotes joining a small group, and states sometimes during his sermon that he is and has been for a long time a member of a small group. It is probably easier for a pastor to be active in a small group, since they do not meet on Sunday mornings, compared to a Sunday School class, which most likely meets at the same time that the pastor is preaching in the worship service. According to Andy Stanley, “success at North Point is defined by how effectively our ministries move people from our large environments into small groups” (Stanley and Young 2002). NPCC’s one numeric goal was to have 80% of their attenders in a small group by 2004, which was met (Stanley and Willits 2004). Andy Stanley and the North Point leadership believe that “a community group is the best place for sustained life change to occur” (Stanley and Young 2002, 79). If somebody attends a mega church, without being a part

of a smaller group environment, it is easy to get lost in the masses on Sunday mornings. Nobody will notice if somebody is sick or experiences any kind of hardship. But in a small group, caring and accountability among twelve people is much more feasible. Small groups constitute a safe environment for forming friendships, sharing, learning, and social interaction. The members of a small group at NPCC sign a covenant, a contract that binds them together under certain rules and expectations. A small group is a closed group, unless all members agree to invite another person or couple. The group agrees to confidentiality, which ensures that the members are able to trust each other when sharing openly. A small group will stay together for an agreed upon time, ranging from 12 to 24 months. After that time period, the group is encouraged to multiply, to divide under two leaders and invite new members, resulting in two small groups of 12 persons each. The multiplication will lead to continued growth of small groups. Small groups are so important to NPCC that they recently added membership in a small group to their requirements of church membership (North Point Community Church Website 2005b). Miller (1997) summarizes what small group members can provide to each other:

“The individuals do what extended families have done for centuries: they share each other’s burdens, comfort one another, rejoice with each other’s victories, and acknowledge their dependency by reaching out to grasp one another, dissolving the separation on which autonomous, self-sufficient modern urbanites so pride themselves” (137).

In addition to the many social and relational benefits of a small group, there is also a very practical reason to have a small group ministry instead of Sunday School classes. Bill Willits points out that

“the main limits to growth for churches tend to be space and parking. When you are out of either, you have no choice but to build more. We (NPCC) will never run out of room or parking with our groups strategy, because people are meeting at homes in neighborhoods around the city” (Stanley and Willits 2004, 98).

NPCC strives to remove the most common obstacles for today's time-pressed adults. Since NPCC's congregation is dispersed throughout metropolitan Atlanta, it would be difficult for people to drive to the church campuses for additional activities besides the Sunday morning service at the church facility. The small groups, since they are formed based on geographic proximity of the members, ensures that even on a weekday evening, the distance to the small group location is reasonable. Another obstacle is childcare during the small group meetings. Therefore, NPCC reimburses the parents for the babysitter fee at a predetermined rate (Stanley and Willits 2004, 168). An additional benefit to NPCC is that although it is expensive to pay these reimbursements, it is cheaper than to build and maintain enough classrooms to hold Sunday School at each of the church campuses.

NPCC hosts an event several times each year called GroupLink, which is a forum for people who are looking to form or join a small group. People have an opportunity to meet other people who live in the same part of town and are in a similar life phase. If a group is formed during a GroupLink event, they will then choose the day of the week they want to meet and the location they want to meet at (generally, but not always, the small group leader's house). There is a six-week "dating" period, during which people can find out if they want to be a part of that particular group. After the six-week period, the covenant is signed by all members and turned in to the church.

A small group has a discussion, round table atmosphere, rather than a teaching environment. In some small groups, the leader facilitates the discussion every week. Other groups choose to rotate the facilitation to any person or couple who is willing to do so. Some groups meet at the same house each week. Others rotate among the members' houses. NPCC has a list of recommended small group books and videos. The group decides together which book or

video to read or watch, and discuss. Some groups memorize Bible verses and have written homework, others do not. Many groups have a dedicated time of prayer and fellowship in addition to the study time. In addition to the general interest small groups, there are some groups with a more specific focus, such as financial wisdom, marriage, and groups for new believers.

Andy Stanley points out the things that NPCC does not have that many other mega churches do have. “For example, we don’t have a Christian school, midweek services, men and women’s ministries, a children’s choir, adult Sunday school, Easter or Christmas pageants, or a recreation ministry” (Stanley, Joiner, Jones 2004, 105). Andy Stanley has co-authored a book with Bill Willits on how to create community through a successful small group ministry (Stanley and Willits 2004). Stanley in his book *7 Practices of Effective Ministry* explains that “in the late 1980s and early 1990s, a number of experts in church growth heralded the concept of creating churches to be ‘one-stop shops’” (Stanley, Joiner, Jones 2004, 102). NPCC is not trying to be that “one-stop shop.” Their main target audience is the unchurched population of metropolitan Atlanta. NPCC’s strategy can be summarized as: Having Andy Stanley as the preacher, and having cutting edge music, technology and children’s programs are great assets to get people in the door. Small groups are the way to keep people coming back.

The minister is a significant factor for choosing a church for 13% of church members. Especially in mega churches, the pastor’s role is very important. The senior pastor is the face of the church. He preaches the Sunday morning sermon, and therefore is in front of the church congregation for 30-40 minutes each Sunday. “More than other churches, these huge congregations are typically built around the charisma of one pastor” (Blake 2003b). The preaching style of a mega church pastor has to appeal to many people. Dr. Johnny Hunt at FBCW has a traditional Southern Baptist preaching style with a heavy emphasis on Bible

references. He generally has a detailed multi-point outline, which the congregation sees on a big screen, and can read along in the bulletin. Typical of Southern Baptist preachers, his outline is often based on alliteration, starting each point with the same letter of the alphabet. Andy Stanley's preaching is different. It does include Bible references, but focuses on real life applications. In Stanley's (2004, 130) book *7 Practices of Effective Ministries*, Andy Stanley discusses the principle of "teach less for more". He explains that "too much information may, in fact, have a canceling effect – that is, multiple ideas or concepts can actually compete with each other for the listeners' attention and retention". Andy Stanley narrows the scope and discusses one concept in more depth, rather than covering several concepts in the same sermon.

Even though it may be difficult to form a relationship to the pastor of a mega church, it is very important that the senior pastor is charismatic and appears to be approachable. Dr. Hunt at FBCW has a pastor's reception for visitors each Sunday. Dr. Hunt, according to his secretary, is reachable by phone and email. Dr. Hunt is the first pastor since 1948 who has stayed at FBCW for more than 7 years. Andy Stanley, probably due to the higher number of attenders at NPCC, is very difficult to contact. When calling the church, it is impossible to talk directly to Andy Stanley. It is difficult to find Stanley's email address, and emails sent to him are screened by his assistant first. An auto reply is returned to the sender stating that Andy Stanley may not respond to each message. Mega church pastors have been compared to the CEO of a Fortune 500 company (Blake 2003a).

Many churches experience a drop in membership if a long-term senior pastor leaves the church. Usually when a senior pastor leaves a church, either by choice, retirement, or death, a pastor search committee forms to find a replacement. If it is a bigger church, this may be a nation-wide search. It can take a long time from a few months to more than a year to find a

replacement. Jim Law, executive pastor at FBCW, explained their succession strategy in case Dr. Hunt leaves the church. Dr. Hunt, who is now 53 years old, is planning to be at FBCW until his mid-60s. FBCW is planning to hire somebody in the next two to three years to take on parts of Dr. Hunt's pastoral duties, and Law's administrative duties. That way the new pastor has several years to learn how FBCW functions, and the congregation can get to know him.

At age 47, Andy Stanley is the face of NPCC. Because of the multi-campus strategy, he is also the face of four other churches. What will happen if Andy Stanley leaves North Point Ministries? Step 6 in Andy Stanley's book *7 Practices of Effective Ministry* is "replace yourself" (Stanley, Joiner, Jones 2004, 157). "Learning to effectively hand off leadership to the next generation is vital to the longevity of any organization, especially the church" (Stanley, Joiner, Jones 2004, 158). Andy Stanley's replacement strategy has not been made public, but it has been mentioned that other people on the NPCC leadership team, especially Lane Jones, are studying Stanley's preaching technique to learn what makes him such an effective communicator. The campus directors of NPCC's satellite campuses preach the Sunday sermon from time to time, and therefore the congregation has an opportunity to get to know the individual campus director.

The location of the church is only important to 4% of church members. That is a surprisingly low number, but as this study has shown, people are willing to drive a long distance to get to the church of their choice. The cost of that drive is weighed against the benefits of attending that mega church with similar people, and many people are choosing the benefits over the cost. To reduce the cost though, the mega churches try to make the Sunday morning commute as convenient as possible with good access to the church, well-laid out parking, shuttle service, and multiple service times. FBCW is located off Highway 92, which is a four lane urban principal arterial. The church building and a separate entrance tower are very visible from the

street. FBCW has a shuttle system in place that shuttles people from further away lots to the sanctuary and back. FBCW has an extensive team of parking volunteers and policemen who direct traffic. FBCW has many more activities besides the Sunday morning service. A smaller portion of people attends the Sunday evening and Wednesday evening services, and any of the other weekday programs, so traffic control is most important on Sunday mornings.

NPCC's main campus is located close to GA 400/US 19. NPCC only has a fairly small sign at the street. On Sunday mornings traffic is directed by volunteers and policemen to ease traffic congestion. Currently, NPCC's main campus has two entry and exit routes. The 2005 budget has \$3 million allocated to add an additional point of entry. Each of the Sunday morning services is two hours apart, so that the cars from the one service have enough time to clear out before the attenders of the next service start arriving. NPCC uses two parking lots of adjoining buildings to provide additional parking. They also have a few shuttles to transport people from those extra lots to the sanctuary. NPCC's emphasis on small groups, which meet in people's homes, means that access to the campus is only relevant on Sunday mornings. NPCC's multi-campus strategy makes it evident that the NPCC leadership considers location to be an important factor. They would rather open a smaller campus in another part of town than to have more people attend the original campus. Although the current NPCC members are willing to drive to the existing campuses, it is difficult to invite a neighbor or a co-worker to church, if the church is very far away. This is the reason that Buckhead church, the second campus of NPCC was initially opened.

Both FBCW and NPCC hold conferences each year for other church leaders. FBCW has held the Timothy Barnabas conference each year since 1995. It is a leadership conference for pastors in the U.S. and missionaries abroad. Jim Law from FBCW also travels to other churches

as a consultant for church growth and effectiveness. NPCC holds several conferences, such as the Drive Conference, the GrowUp Conference, and the Catalyst Conference, to teach other church leaders how to implement effective ministries. They also have tours of NPCC four times each year, where church leaders from other churches can visit NPCC and observe each of the different ministry areas on Sunday mornings.

Chapter 5 – Conclusion

This study examines the mega church phenomenon that has emerged in the United States since the 1980s, and especially focuses on two suburban mega churches in metropolitan Atlanta. First Baptist Church of Woodstock is an established Southern Baptist mega church in Woodstock, GA that has experienced a great increase in membership since 1986. North Point Community Church located in Alpharetta, GA was only founded in 1995, but has experienced even more rapid growth. The analysis is based on the church member and attender databases of the two churches.

The church records show that the church membership and attendance increase at the two churches under study is higher proportionally than other churches of the same denominations in Georgia. It also proves that the membership growth cannot be explained solely by the population growth in the suburban counties north of Atlanta.

The geocoding functionality in the ArcGIS software matched each congregant's address to a physical location. A straight-line distance analysis shows how far some of the members live from the church, and how long of a distance they commute to get to the church for the Sunday morning service, as well as other church-related activities. Compared to previous distance studies that analyzed travel to church, some the congregants of the two churches under study drive significantly further. Thiessen polygons determine how densely distributed churches are in the study area, and how many other churches the attenders of the two mega churches pass on their way to church. The distance analysis proves that the decision, which church to attend is not based on location or distance. It is based on social factors. People choose to attend church with people like themselves.

The demographic analysis focuses on the gender, marital status, age, number of children, income, occupation and race of the church members and attenders. It compares the two churches to each other, when data are available for both. It also includes comparisons to statewide and nationwide demographics, as well as findings of previous church-related demographic studies.

The age variable is very different between the two churches. The most significant age differences exist for children between the ages of 1 and 12, 19-30 year olds and people age 51 and above. NPCC has a much higher percentage of children than FBCW does. This is due to the innovative and interactive children's programs that NPCC offers, in both small group as well as larger group environments. FBCW has more members between the ages of 19 and 30 than NPCC, as well as more members of age 51 and above. It is not clear why FBCW has a higher appeal to the young adults, although it may partially be explained by the fact that singles as well as couples without children may be undercounted in NPCC's database due to the low emphasis on membership and not entering the database by registering for children's programs. The higher proportion of members above the age of 51 at FBCW may be traced back to the contemporary rock-concert style music at NPCC, which may not appeal to more traditional church members and attenders.

There are more women than men at FBCW. There are also more women at FBCW than there are in the general population. However, there are fewer women at FBCW than previous studies about the gender effect on church attendance have shown. It is possible that non-working women attend church more than working women, and since more women are in the labor force now than there were when the original studies were conducted, this variable needs to be explored further. The church membership data at FBCW did not include data on participation in the labor force.

There are more married adults at FBCW than there are single adults. However, there are fewer married people at FBCW than there are in the general population. This contradicts many previous studies, which showed that marriage is a contributing factor for increased church membership and attendance. There are more married couples with both partners working outside of the house today than there were when some of the original studies were conducted. This may have a negative effect on church involvement due to time constraints.

The number of children in the household, and the household composition are not easily explained. Due to different recording practices at the two churches, the church membership data may be not be the best starting point for assessing these two factors. At FBCW, either attenders who are not yet members are not tracked as much as they are at NPCC, or FBCW has proportionally fewer of those cases. The author suspects that FBCW has proportionally fewer attenders that are not members than NPCC does. NPCC's database consists primarily of attenders, since only a small proportion of their church attenders become members. Since NPCC tries to appeal to the unchurched, they do not want to scare people off by committing them to membership. There are more requirements to become a member at NPCC than at FBCW. At NPCC though, for tracking purposes, anybody who signs up for a program, an event, or a class, gets entered into the database and coded. For the purpose of this study, only members and regular attenders were included. However, it is difficult to gauge how accurate the classification of "regular attender" is. The number of children in the household, and the household composition may be studied more accurately with survey data of the church members and attenders.

In terms of status, particularly when measured by income, education and occupation, both FBCW and NPCC are located in higher status census tracts when compared to the statewide and nationwide averages. When comparing the two churches to each other, NPCC's main campus is

located in a higher status area, with higher incomes, higher levels of educational attainment and a larger proportion of people working in white-collar jobs. Further research is needed to determine whether non-denominational churches particularly appeal to people of higher status.

Both FBCW and NPCC are located in an area with a very homogeneous racial composition. When scanning the crowds on Sunday mornings, both congregations are predominantly white, with few African-American and Asian members and attenders. Since race and ethnic background are not tracked in the church databases, it is not clear whether the Spanish ministries at FBCW contribute to a significantly higher proportion of Hispanics in the congregation. Hispanics are generally more likely to be of a Catholic background, rather than Protestant. Therefore, the ethnic background may be not a significant factor for both the Southern Baptist FBCW and the non-denominational NPCC.

Both churches are located in the South, and therefore benefit from the higher level of religiosity that exists in the southern United States. Although the mega church phenomenon started in California, it has since spread to the Southeast. The Baptist denomination is very dominant in the South. Baptist beliefs place a high emphasis on evangelism, and therefore Baptist churches encourage their congregants to share their faith openly. Research has shown that the existence of the Bible belt, as evidenced in the literal belief of the Bible by residents of the southern states, is a valid regional assessment.

When analyzing the factors that contribute to the choice of a church, the doctrines, the sense of community, the denomination, the minister, the location, and the small group meetings are included and compared. In many of the basic theological doctrines, FBCW and NPCC appear to be similarly conservative and traditional. FBCW has a more detailed published summary of faith statements. However, when attending NPCC, even the doctrines that are not mentioned by

NPCC explicitly, appear to be similar to FBCW. Both churches believe in God as the creator of the universe, the trinity with God, the father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. They both consider the Bible as their ultimate source of authority and God inspired. They believe that salvation for mankind comes through faith in Jesus alone.

The sense of community is crucial for mega churches. The southern United States, and especially metropolitan Atlanta, have experienced a high level of population increase in recent years. The new residents of Atlanta are searching for community. The sense of community is expressed in the small group environments of the Sunday School ministry at FBCW and the small group ministry at NPCC. Although they are somewhat different in practice both Sunday School classes as well as small groups, scale the mega church down from a mass organization to a relational level. FBCW achieves that smaller scale through Sunday School classes that meet on Sunday mornings in the church buildings in a teaching environment. NPCC provides the small group environment, where up to 12 people meet in somebody's home in a round table discussion style.

A mega church, more so than smaller churches, is built around the minister. The minister is the most visible person on staff. Although a mega church pastor is not able to be on a first name basis with every person in the congregation, they need to appear approachable and relatable. Both Dr. Johnny Hunt at FBCW and Andy Stanley at NPCC are very effective communicators in their own styles. A survey of FBCW and NPCC members and attenders may show how important of a factor the senior pastors are in an individual's choice of a church home. It is very important for mega churches to have a succession strategy for their senior pastors. A mega church can lose a significant portion of their congregation when the senior pastor leaves the church. Both FBCW and NPCC are prepared for that case.

The educational and other programs for children were covered in the age section of the demographic analysis. FBCW uses a traditional Sunday School ministry for their children's programming, in addition to some larger group environments. NPCC uses small groups starting from a very early age, where one adult is the point of contact for 3 to 5 children. NPCC also has an environment called KidStuf, which brings parents and their children together. It is an interactive, high-energy program with music and drama appealing to children in a Nickelodeon style. KidStuf was developed by NPCC staff, and is being used at their two campuses and the satellite churches. Other churches, which are interested in setting up KidStuf at their church can do so with the help of NPCC.

The location was not very important to many respondents in the factors of choosing a church. That proves that in the cost-benefit analysis of considering the cost of time and distance to get to a far away church are outweighed by the benefits that these mega churches provide. Either residents of metropolitan Atlanta are so used to driving long distances, that it does not contribute a highly negative factor, or the appeal of the mass organization, the charismatic minister, and the variety of children's programming appear so beneficial that the cost of driving is insignificant. A major factor in choosing a church for the suburban career-driven single or married adult is the sense of meaning and belonging. The sense of belonging is imparted by attending a church with people like themselves. In today's suburbs, people may not have close friendships to their neighbors, but they are socially engaged in a church congregation that is up to 100 miles from their residence in order to satisfy the need for community and social networks in a highly mobile society.

REFERENCES

722. *History*. <http://www.722.org/flash/722.html> (last accessed 29 June 2005).

Alhadeff, S. Jack, J. W. Musser, A. C. Sandercock, and T. R. Dyar. 1997. Geographic Names Information System for Georgia. *Digital Environmental Atlas of Georgia*. Georgia Geologic Survey Publication CD-1. <http://csat.er.usgs.gov/cd/cd.html> (last accessed 15 July 2005).

American Religion Data Archive. 2003. *Exploring Religious America*. http://www.thearda.com/FR_Index.html?/archive/Description/RELIGN02.html (last accessed 23 June 2005).

Ammerman, Nancy T. 1997. *Congregation and Community*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Aycock, Ryan D. 2003. *Megachurches: How the Individual's Search for Meaning Led to the Disneyfication of the Church*. <http://plaza.ufl.edu/aycock/thesis.pdf> (last accessed 29 June 2005).

Azzi, Cory, and Ronald G. Ehrenberg. 1975. Household Allocation of Time and Church Attendance. *Journal of Political Economy*. 83:27-56.

Bankston, Carl L. 2003. Rationality, Choice, and the Religious Economy: Individual and Collective Rationality in Supply and Demand. *Review of Religious Research*. 45(2):155-171.

Bell, Bill D. 1971. Church Participation and the Family Life Cycle. *Review of Religious Research*. 13(1):57-64.

Birkin, Mark, Graham Clarke, Martin Clarke, and Alan Wilson. 1996. *Intelligent GIS: Location Decisions and Strategic Planning*. New York: John Wiley & Sons Inc.

Blake, John. 2003a. Metro Atlanta's Megachurches. *Atlanta Journal Constitution*. 20 April: 1A.

Blake, John. 2003b. Stepping Up. *Atlanta Journal Constitution*. 21 April: 1D.

Blake, John. 2004. Salvation by Satellite. *Atlanta Journal Constitution*. 28 November: 1A.

Bonner, Matthew R. et al. 2003. Positional Accuracy of Geocoded Addresses in Epidemiologic Research. *Epidemiology*. 14(4):408-412.

Breault, Kevin D. 1989. New Evidence on Religious Pluralism, Urbanism, and Religious Participation. *American Sociological Review*. 54:1048-1053.

Broadway, Bill. 2004. Services Fit for an Arena. *Washington Post*. 15 May: B09.

Brown, Zachary. The Wal-Mart Epidemic: The Case Against Wal-Mart in Vermont. *Vermont Journal of Environmental Law*. April 13, 2005.

Buckhead Church. *Frequently Asked Questions*. <http://www.buckheadchurch.org/faqs#faq110> (last accessed 14 June 2005).

Bultena, Louis. 1949. Church Membership and Church Attendance in Madison, Wisconsin. *American Sociological Review*. 14(3):384-389.

Carlos, Serge. 1975. Religious Participation and the Urban-Suburban Continuum. *The American Journal of Sociology*. 75(5):742-759.

Carroll, Bret E. 2002. Reflections on Regionalism and U.S. Religious History. *Church History*. 71:120-131.

Chalfant, H. Paul, and Peter L. Heller. 1991. Rural/Urban Regional Differences in Religiosity. *Review of Religious Research*. 33(1):76-87.

Cimino, Richard P., and Don Lattin. 1998. *Shopping for Faith: American Religion in the New Millenium*. Jossey-Bass Inc., San Francisco, California.

Clarke, Clifford J. 1990. The Bible Belt Thesis. An Empirical Test of the Hypothesis of Clergy Overrepresentation, 1890-1930. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*. 29(2):210-225.

Diamond, Etan. 1999. *Religion and Mobility in 20th Century Indianapolis*. Research Notes. The Polis Center. The Project on Religion and Urban Culture.
<http://www.polis.iupui.edu/ruc/printable/146.asp> (last accessed 23 August 2004).

Dietrich, T. Stanton. 1960. Nature and Directions of Suburbanization in the South.
Social Forces. 39(2):181-186.

Dodson, Dan W. 1959. Religion in Suburbia. *Journal of Educational Sociology*. 32(8):365-373.

Donahue, Michael J., and Peter L. Benson. *Belief Style, Congregational Climate, and Program Quality*. <http://hirr.hartsem.edu/bookshelf/church&denomgrowth/ch&dngrowth-ch11.pdf> (last accessed 23 August 2004).

Dougherty, Kevin D. 2004. Institutional Influences on Growth in Southern Baptist Congregations. *Review of Religious Research*. 46(2):117-132.

Easum, Bill. *The Exponential Church*.
http://www.outreachmagazine.com/article_archive/unknowndate/article_17.html (last accessed 14 June 2005).

Edmondson, Brad. 1996. *Who Needs Two Cars? Automobile Ownership Statistics*.
http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m4021/is_n12_v18/ai_18894247 (last accessed 12 June 2005).

Ehrenberg, Ronald G. 1977. Household Allocation of Time and Religiosity: Replication and Extension. *Journal of Political Economy*. 85(2):415-424.

Farnsley, Arthur E. 2003. *Rising Expectations: Urban Congregations, Welfare Reform, and Civic Life*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

Finke, Roger, and Rodney Stark. 1988. Religious Mobilization in American Cities, 1906. *American Sociological Review*. 53(1):41-49.

Finke, Roger, and Rodney Stark. 1989. Evaluating the Evidence: Religious Economies and Sacred Canopies. *American Sociological Review*. 54(6):1054-1056.

Finke, Roger, and Rodney Stark. 1992. *The Churching of America, 1776-1990*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Finney, John M., and Gary R. Lee. 1977. Age Differences on Five Dimensions of Religious Involvement. *Review of Religious Research*. 18(2):173-184.

First Baptist Church of Woodstock. *The History of First Baptist Church Woodstock 1837 – 1987*. <http://www.fbcw.org/info/history/upto-1987/historybook/chapter01.php> (last accessed 14 June 2005a).

First Baptist Church of Woodstock. *Main Page*. <http://www.fbcw.org> (last accessed 14 June 2005b).

First Baptist Church of Woodstock. *FBCW – Doctrine*. <http://www.fbcw.org/info/doctrine/default.html> (last accessed 29 June 2005c).

Fotheringham, A. Stewart. 1981. Spatial Structure and Distance-Decay Parameters. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*. 71(3):425-437.

Francis, Leslie J., David W. Lankshear, and Susan H. Jones. 2000. The Influence of the Charismatic Movement on Local Church Life: A Comparative Study among Anglican Rural, Urban and Suburban Churches. *Journal of Contemporary Religion*. 15(1):121-131.

Generation Next. <http://www.gennext.ca/whywho.htm> (last accessed 12 June 2005).

Georgia Facts and Figures. *The Four Georgias*. University of Georgia. College of Family and Consumer Sciences, Housing and Demographics Research Center. <http://www.fcs.uga.edu/hace/gafacts/> (last accessed 16 July 2005).

Glenmary Research Center. 2000. *Largest Participating Religious Groups*. http://www.glenmary.org/grc/RCMS_2000/maps/Largest_Group.jpg (last accessed 16 July 2005).

Gockel, Galen L. 1969. Income and Religious Affiliation: A Regression Analysis. *The American Journal of Sociology*. 74(6):632-647.

Goode, Erich. 1966. Social Class and Church Participation. *The American Journal of Sociology*. 72(1):102-111.

Hadaway, Kirk C. *Church Growth in North America: The Character of a Religious Marketplace*. <http://hrr.hartsem.edu/bookshelf/church&denomgrowth/ch&dngrow-ch17.pdf> (last accessed 23 August 2004).

Hadaway, Kirk C. 1981. The Demographic Environment and Church Membership Change. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*. 20:77-89.

Hadaway, Kirk C. 1982. Church Growth (and Decline) in a Southern City. *Review of Religious Research*. 23:372-386.

Hartshorn, Truman, A. 1992. *Interpreting the City: An Urban Geography*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Hoge, Dean R, and Jackson W. Carroll. 1978. Determinants of Commitment and Participation in Suburban Protestant Churches. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*. 17:107-127.

Holloway, Julian, and Oliver Valins. 2002. Editorial: Placing Religion and Spirituality in Geography. *Social & Cultural Geography*. 3(1):5-9.

Hudnut-Beumler, James. 1994. *Looking for God in the Suburbs: The Religion of the American Dream and Its Critics, 1945-1965*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Huntington, Samuel P. 2004. *Are We a Nation "Under God"?* The American Enterprise. http://www.taemag.com/issues/articleid.18076/article_detail.asp (last accessed 14 June 2005).

Iannaccone, Laurence R, and Sean F. Everton. 2004. Never on Sunny Days: Lessons from Weekly Attendance Counts. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*. 43(2):191-207.

Iannaccone, Laurence R., and Roger Finke, and Rodney Stark. 1997. Religion: The Economics of Church and State. *Economic Inquiry*. 35(2):350-365.

Jackson, Elton F., and William S. Fox, and Harry J. Crockett, Jr. 1970. Religion and Occupational Achievement. *American Sociological Review*. 35(1):48-63.

Kaczorowski, Laura M. 1997. *Willow Creek: Conversion without Commitment*.
<http://religiousmovements.lib.virginia.edu/nrms/superch.html> (last accessed 23 August 2004).

Kellstedt, Lyman, A., and John C. Green. 2003. The Politics of the Willow Creek Association Pastors. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*. 42(4):547-561.

Kilborn, Peter T. 2005. The Five-Bedroom, Six-Figure Rootless Life. *New York Times*. 1 June.

Klinger, Jerry. The Struggle to Survive in the New World. *The Jewish Magazine*.
<http://jewishmag.com/87mag/usa11/usa11.htm> (last accessed 19 June 2005).

Kong, Lily. 1990. Geography and Religion: Trends and Prospects. *Progress in Human Geography*. 14(3):355-371.

Krieger, Nancy, Pamela Waterman, Kerry Lemineux, Sally Zierler, Joseph W. Hogan. 2001. On the Wrong Side of the Tracts? Evaluating the Accuracy of Geocoding in Public Health Research. *American Journal of Public Health*. 91(7):1114-1116.

Landis, Benson Y. 1959. A Guide to the Literature on Statistics of Religious Affiliation with References to Related Social Studies. *Journal of the American Statistical Association*. 54(286):335-357.

Lazerwitz, Bernard. 1961. Some Factors Associated with Variations in Church Attendance. *Social Forces*. 39(4):301-309.

Lazerwitz, Bernard. 1962. National Data on Participation Rates Among Residential Belts in the United States. *American Sociological Review*. 27(5):691-696.

Lenski, Gerhard E. 1953. Social Correlates of Religious Interest. *American Sociological Review*. 18(5):533-544.

Levine, Gregory J. 1986. On the Geography of Religion. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*. 11(4):428-440.

Lewis, James W. 1996. Book Review: Looking for God in the Suburbs: The Religion of the American Dream and Its Critics, 1945-1965 by James Hudnut-Beumler. *Church History*. 65(2): 310-311.

Lindner, Eileen W. *Megachurches: How Do They Count?*
<http://www.electronicchurch.org/2003.Theme.pdf> (last accessed 19 June 2004).

Liu, Betty. 2003. The Aisles Runneth over in America's Holy Wal-Marts - Suburban Megachurches Attract Congregations. *The Financial Times*. 25 October: 18.

Long, Stephen H., Settle, Russell F. 1977. Household Allocation of Time and Church Attendance: Some Additional Evidence. *Journal of Political Economy*. 85(2):409-414.

Loveland, Matthew T. 2003. Religious Switching: Preference Development, Maintenance, and Change. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*. 42(1):147-157.

Lummis, Adair T. 2004. A Research Note: Real Men and Church Participation. *Review of Religious Research*. 45(4):404-415.

MacDonald, Fraser. 2002. Towards a Spatial Theory of Worship: Some Observations from Presbyterian Scotland. *Social & Cultural Geography*. 3(1):61-80.

Malczewski, Jack. 1999. *GIS and Multicriterial Decision Analysis*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Miller, Donald E. 1997. *Reinventing American Protestantism: Christianity in the new Millenium*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Mori, M. 2001. Contemporary Religious Meaning of the Pilgrimage Route. *Human Geography*. 53(2):75-91.

Mueller, Charles W., and Weldon T. Johnson. 1975. Socioeconomic Status and Religious Participation. *American Sociological Review*. 40(6):785-800.

National & World Religion Statistics. http://www.adherents.com/rel_USA.html#religions (last accessed 14 June 2005).

Nelson, Dick, and John Niles. 2000. Observations on the Causes of Nonwork Travel Growth. Transportation Research Board 79th Annual Meeting. Paper No. 00-1242.

Newman, Harvey K. 1991. God and the Growth Machine. *Review of Religious Research*. 32(3):237-244.

North Point Community Church. *FAQ-Community*. <http://www.northpoint.org/faq-community> (last accessed 14 June 2005a).

North Point Community Church. *FAQ-Membership*. <http://www.northpoint.org/faq-membership#faq60> (last accessed 14 June 2005b).

North Point Community Church. *History*. <http://www.northpoint.org/about-us-history> (last accessed 14 June 2005c).

North Point Community Church. *Main Page*. <http://www.northpoint.org> (last accessed 14 June 2005d).

North Point Community Church. *About Us*. <http://www.northpoint.org/about-us> (last accessed 29 June 2005e).

North Point Ministries. *Main Page*. <http://www.northpointministries.org> (last accessed 14 June 2005).

Noyce, Gaylord B. 1970. *The Responsible Suburban Church*. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press.

Perl, Paul, and Daniel V.A. Olson. 2000. Religious Market Share and Intensity of Church Involvement in Five Denominations. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*. 39(1):12-32.

Phillips, Rick. 2004. Can Rising rates of Church Participation be a Consequence of Secularization? *Sociology of Religion*. 65(2):139-154.

Putnam, Robert D. 2000. *Bowling Alone*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Rainer, Thom. *High Expectation Churches*. <http://www.joshhunt.com/highexpectations.htm> (last accessed 24 June 2005).

Roof, Wade C. 1976. Traditional Religion in Contemporary Society: A Theory of Local-Cosmopolitan Plausibility. *American Sociological Review*. 41(2):195-208.

Roof, Wade Clark, and Hoge, Dean R. 1980. Church Involvement in America: Social Factors Affecting Membership and Participation. *Review of Religious Research*. 21(4):405-427.

Rybnicek, Edward H. 1962. *Changing Church in the Changing City*. PhD Dissertation. University of Minnesota.

Sands, Gary, and Smock, Sue M. 1994. Religious Identification, Church Attendance and the Trip to Church. *Transportation Quarterly*. 48(2):185-197.

Schuman, Howard. 1971. The Religious Factor in Detroit: Review, Replication, and Reanalysis. *American Sociological Review*. 36(1):30-48.

Sherkat, Darren E., and Wilson, John. 1995. Preferences, Constraints, and Choices in Religious Markets: An Examination of Religious Switching. *Social Forces*. 73(3):993-1027.

Sherkat, Darren E. 2001. Tracking the Restructuring of American Religion: Religious Affiliation and Patterns of Religious Mobility, 1973-1998. *Social Forces*. 79(14):1459-1494.

Shipley, Frederick A. 1964. *Protestantism in Suburban Life*. New York: Abingdon Press.

Shippo, Jan. *See you in Church? Religion and Culture in Urban America*. <http://www.polis.iupui.edu/ruc/printable/351.asp> (last accessed 23 August 2004).

Skov-Petersen, Hans. *Estimation of Distance-Decay Parameters – GIS Based Indicators of Recreational Accessibility*. <http://www.nlh.no/conf/scangis2001/papers/22.pdf>. (last accessed 12 June 2005).

Smith, Christian, and M. L. Denton, and R. Faris, and M. Regnerus. 2002. Mapping American Adolescent Religious Participation. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*. 41(4):597-612.

Sopher, David E. 1981. Geography and Religions. *Progress in Human Geography*. 5(4):510-524.

Spickard, James V. 1998. Rethinking Religious Social Action: What is "Rational" about Rational-Choice Theory? *Sociology of Religion*. 59(2):99-116.

Stanley, Andy. *An Interview with Andy Stanley*. <http://web.archive.org/web/20010226175009/http://www.northpoint.org> (last accessed 14 June 2005).

Stoddard, Robert H., and Carolyn V. Prorok. ed. Gaile, Gary L, and Cort J. Willmot. 2003. Geography of Religion and Belief Systems. In *Geography in America at the Dawn of the 21st Century*. New York: Oxford University Press Inc.

Stonebraker, Robert J. 1993. Optimal Church Size: The Bigger The Better? *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*. 32(3):231-241.

The Center for GIS and Spatial Analysis at West Chester University. quantifactus.wcupa.edu/lab/geo103/g103c3.ppt (last accessed 14 June 2005).

The Clean Air Campaign. *Your Commute*. http://www.cleanaircampaign.com/index.php/cac/your_commute (last accessed 13 June 2005).

The Sunday School Page. 1999. *Adult Sunday School Promotion*. <http://www.ss.school.com/content/promotion.htm>. (last accessed 24 June 2005).

Thumma, Scott. 1996. Megachurches of Atlanta. ed. Gary Laderman. In *Religions of Atlanta: Religious Diversity in the Centennial Olympic City*. Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press.

Thumma, Scott. *Exploring the Megachurch Phenomena: Their Characteristics and Cultural Context*. Hartford Institute of Religion Research.
http://hirr.hartsem.edu/bookshelf/thumma_article2.html (last accessed 23 August 2004a).

Thumma, Scott. *Topical Findings*. Hartford Institute of Religion Research.
<http://fact.hartsem.edu/topfindings/topicalfindings.htm> (last accessed 23 August 2004b).

Thumma, Scott. *What God Makes Free is Free Indeed: Nondenominational Church Identity and its Networks of Support*. Hartford Institute of Religion Research.
http://hirr.hartsem.edu/bookshelf/thumma_article5.html (last accessed 23 August 2004c).

Thumma, Scott. *Congregational Worship*. Hartford Institute of Religion Research.
<http://fact.hartsem.edu/denom/Megas-FactFreq.pdf> (last accessed 26 June 2005).

Tillman, Benjamin F., and Chad F. Emmett. 1999. Spatial Succession of Sacred Space in Chicago. *Journal of Cultural Geography*. 18(2):79-109.

Tobler, Waldo R. 1970. A Computer Movie Simulating Urban Growth in the Detroit Region. *Economic Geography*. 46(2):234-240.

Tuan, Yi-Fu. 1976. Humanistic Geography. *The Annals of the Association of American Geographers*. 66(2):266-276.

Van Horn, Stephen L. 1996. *Defining A Role For A Small Suburban Church In A Megachurch Environment*. Theological Research Exchange Network (TREN): Theses & Dissertations.

De Vaus, David. 1984. Workforce Participation and Sex Differences in Church Attendance. *Review of Religious Research*. 25(3):247-256.

De Vaus, David, and Ian McAllister. 1987. Gender Differences in Religion: A Test of the Structural Location Theory. *American Sociological Review*. 52(4):472-481.

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. *Hispanic Affairs – Demographics*.
<http://www.usccb.org/hispanicaffairs/demo.shtml> (last accessed 22 June 2005).

Warren, Rick. 2003. Relationships Hold your Church Together.
<http://www.pastors.com/article.asp?ArtID=3917> (last accessed 24 June 2005).

Wikipedia. Waldo R. Tobler. http://www.biography.ms/Waldo_R._Tobler.html. (last accessed 18 June 2005).

Winter, Gibson. 1961. *The Suburban Captivity of the Churches*. New York: Doubleday & Company Inc.

Wuthnow, Robert. 1993. *Christianity in the 21st Century: Reflections on the Challenges Ahead*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Zelinsky, Wilbur. 1961. An Approach to the Religious Geography of the United States: Patterns of Church Membership in 1952. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*. 51(2):139-193.

Zimmer, Basil G, and Amos H. Hawley. 1959. Suburbanization and Church Participation. *Social Forces*. 37(4):348-354.