

## What Will It Take to Reach Unchurched Families in Your Neighborhood?

By Dale Hudson

A recent report from Barna research says there are over 156 million people in America who do not attend church, including over 42 million children and teenagers.

In the last 10 years, the number of adults who do not attend church has increased by 30 percent. This is an increase of 38 million people who are now unchurched.

Here are some characteristics of the unchurched ...

1. They probably used to attend church. Only about 24 percent have never attended church at any time in their life. Seventy-six percent have firsthand experience with one or more churches and have decided they can better use their time in other ways.
2. There's a good chance they're cohabiting. Unchurched adults are four times more likely to be cohabiting.
3. They are likely to be Gen X-ers (ages 34 to 49) or Boomers (ages 50 to 68). Gen X-er's make up 33 percent of the unchurched and Boomers make up 35 percent. This group is comprised of many families who have kids and grandkids.
4. They would probably consider themselves "Christian." Though they do not attend church, 62 percent consider themselves "Christians." Many are still culturally tied to Christianity and are still interested in it. Thirty-four percent would describe themselves as "deeply spiritual," and 41 percent say their faith is very important in their life. Thirty-three percent say they have an active relationship with God that influences their life.

As I read these stats, these thoughts are upon my heart ...

Who wants to attend a dead church?

Seventy-six percent have been to church, and that's why they are not attending. If a church is spiritually dead and not relevant to your life, why would you want to spend your Sundays there when you could be at the lake?

More than ever, our country needs churches that are thriving! You see, where there is life, there is growth. Where there is life, new families are being reached. Where there is life, the baptism waters are being stirred.

Where does life come from? The Spirit of God. When the Holy Spirit is moving with power in a church, people will be drawn to it.

Churches must be a hospital instead of a museum.

Our churches must be spiritual hospitals where people who are hurting and damaged by sin are welcomed with open arms and can find healing, forgiveness and love.

I wonder how many unchurched families have walked into a “museum” where they were snubbed by perfect Christians who were on display?

Could a family who is cohabiting walk into your church and feel accepted? Before you get upset, notice I said accepted ... not approved. There is a difference between acceptance and approval. No, we do not approve of the lifestyle, but yes, we can love them and accept them just as they are. If we can allow them to belong before they believe, we can reach them. Remember, Jesus cleans his fish after He catches them.

### Churches must make children’s ministry and reaching kids a top priority.

The stats show that the biggest percentage of the unchurched are families with kids. I believe the key to reaching the biggest majority of unchurched families is by reaching their kids. I have personally seen it happen again and again. God can use a child to bring their parents to Christ.

As you look across the country, you will find that churches that are growing and reaching people have dynamic children’s ministries.

When you take a child by the hand ... you take a parent by the heart.

### Churches must help people see it’s about relationship instead of religion.

As you look at the stats, you can see that a big percentage of the unchurched are simply tired of “religion.” We must emphasize by word and deed that Jesus is the missing relationship that they are searching for.

I sat yesterday with four of our new volunteers. They all had some things in common. Until recently, they were part of the unchurched percentage. They had been raised in churches where it was all about tradition, rules, chanting meaningless prayers and kneeling at the appropriate time. And as soon as the decision was theirs, they ran from it.

Over time, their journeys had led them to our church. Some came by the invitation of a friend, some came when they were going through a hard time and realized they were missing something, and some came because a co-worker invited them.

They had then discovered a true relationship with Jesus and their lives had been transformed. They found a church family where they could grow, learn and serve. They are now out of the “unchurched” category and part of our church ... ready to serve and reach others with the love and message of Jesus Christ.