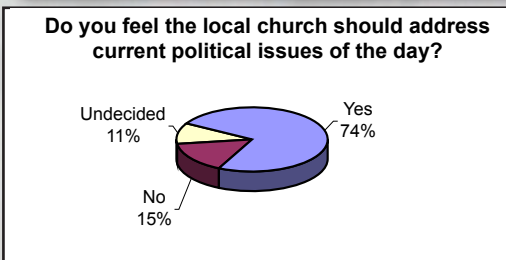
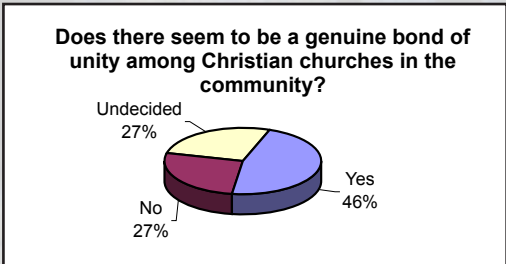


A Pastor Survey and Census of Richland County for the Year 2006

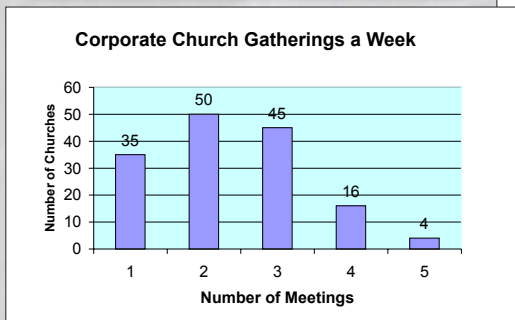
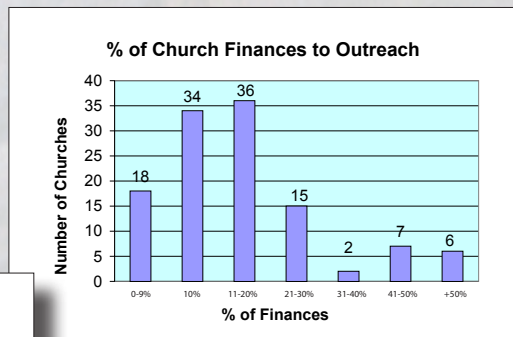
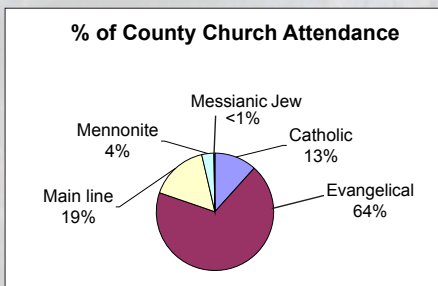
ABSTRACT

A study done from July 2006 to November 2006 of churches in Richland County found that up to two hundred twenty Bible-believing churches exist inside the county. One hundred-fifty pastors returned surveys containing information on their church attendance, church membership, church giving, and viewpoints of the local community. Findings of the two hundred and twenty churches indicate that twenty-four percent of the total county population attends a Bible-believing church with an estimated thirty-seven percent of the county population belonging to a Bible-believing church. Only forty-six percent of the pastors that responded felt that there was a genuine bond of unity among Christian churches in the community. Of particular note, seventy-four percent of the pastors felt that the local church should address current political issues of the day.



INTRODUCTION

There is no better way to understand a community and where its future lies than to grasp the spirituality of a community. Discerning the spiritual fiber of a community can be similar to looking for a needle in a haystack; it can seem almost impossible to accomplish. One way perhaps to obtain a "silhouette" of a community and what is on its horizon is to look at its history and the places where its residents gravitate. For example, the history of community's church attendance can be a meaningful clue as to the appetite of a particular people group.



No doubt, while church attendance appears to have declined in recent times, it would be plausible to assume that people are gravitating towards other localities and lifestyles. On July 6, 2006, it was reported that Ohio's prison population increased by six percent from the previous year.¹ To cope with the rapid rise in prisoners, the state has begun transferring inmates from around the state to overcrowded prisons that have little available space. According to Mansfield City Police Chief Phil Messer, the majority of area crime is concentrated near bars where alcohol is served.² In Richland County, there are one hundred and twelve bar establishments with two hundred and ninety-eight locations where liquor can be purchased.³

METHODOLOGY

Boundaries of this church census study and pastor survey incorporated only Bible-believing churches within Richland County. A Bible-believing church is defined as a gathering of persons whose worldview is based on the foundation of the infallible Word of Yahweh. A worldview is the framework from which we view reality and make sense of life and the world. This gathering strives to follow the teachings of Jesus the Christ in all areas of life. This study did not account for home churches that may exist in the area.

Of the two hundred twenty churches that were mailed a pastor survey, one hundred-fifty pastors completed and returned their survey. Each church was contacted by phone several times and in some cases the survey was done over the phone. When a survey was not received, a visit was made during the regular church service to obtain a count of how many attend. In some cases, contact was made with church secretaries, members of the ministry team, or long time members to obtain critical information.

When individual answers were left blank on the survey, they were not counted in the results. When individual answers included a range, the average was used as the answer. A registration number was given for every survey assuring confidentiality with the hopes of securing more accurate answers. Churches who did not respond were visited beginning late August and on; this was done to avoid low summer attendance. In two instances, there were pastors that pastored two churches within the county and thus were surveyed twice. Not every comment was listed from the pastor survey in this report.

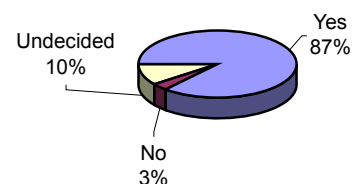
To obtain the percentages of the county population who either attend or are members of a church in the survey, the total population in Richland County of 128,852⁴ was used. It is believed that no dramatic shift in this population statistic has occurred since the census was taken. A team comprised of five helped complete this report. This project was carried out from the Biblical text of Nehemiah 7:5. A personal appointment can be made to review the report results by contacting Ben Mutti at 419.884.3648.

RESULTS

Total county church attendance was 30,820, or twenty-four percent of the county population. An estimate of thirty-seven percent for the total county membership was made using the ratio of the attendance and membership figures received from the returned surveys (24,742/38,041) with the total church attendance (30,820/X). Forty-six percent of the pastors who returned surveys reported that they had home-based small groups within their fellowship. Fifty-five churches reported having church websites. Ten known ministerial alliances currently exist within the county. Pastors in the survey made the following comments:

“Many of us are bound together in Christ but are not pursuing one another. So often we are caught up in what we are doing that pursuing one another as the greater Body of Christ in our area is very low on the list and often is not on the radar screen.”..... “In my opinion, most Christian churches are not interested in reaching out to bond with other Christian churches. We thank God for the ones who do!”..... “It’s time that those who feel that churches are not relevant in community know the extent of attendance in our communities. Those who are in leadership need to be reminded that they serve more conservative Christians than they realize. I hope this census will be shared with our political leaders, thus they may give serious and perhaps prayerful thought to decisions they make.”..... “I am confident that God has given us this county and I will not rest until God’s purpose for this community is fulfilled.”

Do you have a hopeful expectancy for the future of Richland County?



REFERENCES

- ¹ “Ohio’s Prison Population Increased 6 Percent in Past Year,” Mansfield News Journal; July 6, 2006.
- ² “Top Cop Seeks Neighborhood Help,” by Mark Caudill, Mansfield News Journal; September 14, 2006.
- ³ <http://www.liquorcontrol.ohio.gov/richland.txt>; November 13, 2006.
- ⁴ <http://factfinder.census.gov>, 2000 U.S. Census Bureau Report; November 29, 2006.