

CHAPTER THREE

INTRODUCTION

This chapter has two parts. Part one describes the location of Atlanta, the locus of the research, and provides an overview of its history, economy, and demographics. Part two describes how the study proceeded including how the churches included in the study were identified and the basic methodology employed in conducting the surveys and interviews.

3.1. LOCATION OF THE STUDY

3.1.1 Georgia

Georgia is the largest of the fourteen States that make up the region known in the United States as the “South.” The State of Georgia lies along the Atlantic Ocean in the southeastern part of the country. Georgia is the twenty-first in size among the fifty States and is the largest State East of the Mississippi. The creation of Georgia as a colony was instigated by James Oglethorpe. In 1732, Oglethorpe convinced King George II of England to grant him (and several of his friends) the land between South Carolina and Florida as a place for English debtors to start a new life. The colony was to be run by Oglethorpe and twenty other “trustees” and, unlike other colonies, was to have no slavery. In order to encourage faster development, the “debtors only” policy was soon dropped, but Georgia remained unattractive to potential developers because of its ban on slavery. In 1750, when the slavery ban was finally lifted, thousands of new settlers moved into the state. Georgia then shifted from government by trustees to become a royal colony, a condition it enjoyed until the Revolutionary War (1775-1783). In 1788, Georgia became the fourth State when it approved the U.S. Constitution, but voluntarily

gave up that status during the civil war (1861-1865), when it seceded from the Union and joined the Confederacy. In 1870, five years after the end of the war, Georgia was readmitted into the Union.

Georgia's topography ranges from coastal plain in the southeastern third of the state, gradually increasing in elevation through the piedmont and finally, as one moves to the northwest, peaking in the Blue Ridge mountains of the Appalachian range.

3.1.2 Atlanta

Atlanta is the capital of the State of Georgia. The city of Atlanta is located in the central piedmont of northwestern Georgia. The city was founded in 1837 and was first called "Terminus," since it was located at the terminus of the Western and Atlantic railroad line. A few years later it was named "Marthasville," before finally receiving its current name in 1845. It was several more years before it was made the state capital, in 1868.

3.1.3 Economy and Demographics

Outside of the metropolitan area of Atlanta farming and textiles have always been the mainstay of the state. Cotton, tobacco, peanuts, and peaches are major agricultural crops. Georgia leads the nation in chicken farming, and as a textile producer (carpets, clothing, yarn) Georgia ranks second nationally, with North Carolina taking first place.

The city of Atlanta itself, originally a railroad terminus, served first to move crops and farm products to markets. As the city grew, it encouraged commerce and residential living and became a transportation hub for people as well as goods. As the capital city, Atlanta soon became the leading city of the New South and a transportation center for the entire region. Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport is one of the busiest in the nation.

Atlanta is now known as a communication center and as the headquarters for many worldwide businesses such as Cable News Network (CNN), Coca Cola, and Delta Airlines. Atlanta is also the headquarters for several federal agencies, and there are a number of very important military bases within the greater metropolitan area.

The population of Georgia is approximately 8.5 million, of Greater Atlanta (the city and its six immediately adjacent counties) 3,033,000, and of the city of Atlanta proper, 416,000.¹ Georgia's population is racially very mixed. In addition to about 13,000 American Indians (mostly Creek and Cherokee), about one in three Georgians is black and Georgia is home to some 173,000 Asians. The greater Atlanta area also accommodates mounting numbers of Hispanics, mainly from Mexico, but with increasing numbers from Central America (Guatemala, Honduras, Panama, and Costa Rica), Venezuela, and Brazil. Georgia's Hispanic population has grown from about 100,000 in 1994 to more than a half million in 2004. Exact numbers for the Hispanic population are, however, hard to ascertain since many Hispanics are illegal aliens who, because of their status, try hard to be "invisible" to the authorities.

3.2. APPLYING THE RESEARCH

3.2.1. Geographic Boundaries

One of the first issues that arose in the empirical phase of this research was identifying the geographically delimited area in which the study was to be undertaken; chapter one merely identified the area as "greater metropolitan Atlanta" (above, p. 11). Further examination demonstrated that the commonly used terms, "greater" Atlanta and "metropolitan" Atlanta, are not correspondent and even within each term there are many

¹Census data obtained from http://factfinder.census.gov/home/saff/main.html?_lang=en

interpretations. Circles around the city encompassing “greater” or “metropolitan” Atlanta vary in size depending on the authority producing them (e.g. city, county, state, and federal government offices, denominational offices, tax offices, etc.) and range in radius from a low of ten miles, incorporating only the inner parts of the surrounding six counties (Fulton, Cobb, Gwinnett, DeKalb, Clayton, and Henry) to a radius of some fifty miles, incorporating all of the surrounding twenty counties.

The limited means and resources of a single researcher required a diameter large enough to give a representative sampling of urban, suburban, and rural churches, while limiting the amount of travel necessary for the research. A radius of twenty-five miles was determined to meet these requirements.

3.2.2 Church Identification

On-line denominational church listings and on-line telephone yellow pages listings initially identified some 5,800 churches in the “greater Atlanta” area, but closer inspection demonstrated that, as with the various offices and authorities identified above, the area included as “greater” Atlanta was somewhat arbitrary – in the current instance, including counties and/or cities as far as sixty miles from the center of the capital. Eliminating churches outside the twenty-five mile radius, an intentional focus on mainstream protestant denominations – e.g. Baptist, Episcopalian/Anglican, Presbyterian/Reformed, Methodist, Congregational, and Lutheran – and by conflating multiple listings (in addition to directory listing by denomination, some churches had opted to be concurrently registered under such categories as “Churches, Christian,” “Churches, Other,” and “Churches, Other Denominations”), the number was reduced to about 560. This count was further abridged by the simple expediency of eliminating any

church whose address could not be electronically verified through the U.S. Mail on-line ZIP code system, an exercise that produced a final tally of 483 churches that offered research potential.

Of the 483 churches thus identified, fifty percent, or 242, were randomly selected to receive a preliminary, seven-question screening survey (see Appendix 1), accompanied by a reply-paid envelope.² The survey was addressed to the attention of the pastor and had two purposes. Responses to the first six questions were intended simply to give an overview of each respondent church. The seventh question however offered survey respondents the opportunity to identify churches in the greater Atlanta metropolitan area that they thought were doing an outstanding job in terms of secular ministries. Any church thus identified, but not included in the first round of survey mailings, was mailed a survey form for completion. At the same time the surveys were in process, denominational leaders, community leaders and leaders of parachurch, governmental, and non-governmental social organizations were polled to identify churches of which they were aware that broadly met the described criteria for holistic ministry. Based on these two sources of information (identification by other churches and by denominational, parachurch, and governmental and non-governmental social organizations), additional surveys were mailed to six churches not included in the first round of surveys. Of these six, three responded. Of the 248 (242+6) screening surveys sent, fifty-one (20%) were returned, but one was incomplete and thus disqualified. Eleven (4.5%) survey letters

² While every effort was made to maintain accuracy in determining church denominations, the pastors of two churches, one Assembly of God, and one Church of Christ, were sent, and returned, preliminary surveys. Although neither church was selected for congregational research, the information they provided was included in the preliminary survey data matrix.

were returned as “undeliverable,” the church either having closed, or moved without a forwarding address.

The returned, completed surveys were then tabulated in terms of the following criteria, identified as axiomatic of the holistic ministry principles detailed in chapter two:

1. Levels of worship attendance,
2. Number of separate ministries to the local community,³
3. The means by which possible ministries were identified (i.e., by the congregation, or by pastoral leadership),
4. The management and organization of community ministries (i.e., by the congregation or by the pastoral leadership), and
5. The level of congregational involvement in community ministries (members and non-members).

To determine holism, two steps were taken. The first was to assign an ascending-order, numerical value to questions 2, 4, 5, and 6 of the survey. E.g., question 2, relating to church attendance, was scaled from 1, for checking box one (less than 20%), to 7, for checking box seven (75% +). Each return was then scored and, working from the assumption that higher church attendance and greater congregational participation are key factors in holism, a higher cumulative value for these questions was considered a preliminary indicator of the church’s overall holistic character. The second step was to further analyze each church’s score in light of the number of outreach ministries it claimed. The result was a listing of respondent churches, ranked from greater to lesser degrees of holistic involvement (see Table 3.1). With the ranked list established, the upper end churches were then labeled “holistic and the lower end churches “non-

³Note that the focus was on ministries by the church that relied on the human, or the human and financial resources of the congregation rather than financial support alone.

holistic,” with the arbitrary cut-off point being 10 declared outreach ministries. It must however be noted that, at least in terms of this simple analysis, rather than there being a particular distinction between holistic and non-holistic church practice, the difference is more one of degree. That is, although there are clear and distinct differences between churches that rank in the top five and those that rank in the bottom five of the list, the difference between one church and its immediate neighbors on the scale is more subtle.

Although the study planned to include just ten churches, it was further anticipated that an uncertain number of churches would decline to participate for a variety of reasons. As a precaution, eighteen churches from the ranked listing of respondent churches developed were randomly selected as candidates for further study – nine from the upper end of the list (representing ten or more community ministries) and nine from the lower (nine or less community ministries). Before proceeding further, the churches were contacted and their survey response verified.

Each church was then sent a letter outlining the research and asking for their participation in it. All nine churches in the upper range invited to participate in the research were willing to do so. Four, however, already had various pressing issues – new building programs, institutionally-driven agenda, and/or internal crises of one form or another that precluded complete and meaningful participation within the available time frame. Just five of the nine churches from the lower end responded positively but fortunately all five were able to participate without the requirement of any special provision or restriction. In all instances the churches were merely told that the purpose of the research was to “understand the scope and nature of and motivating forces behind

community ministry.” The approximate locations of the participating churches are identified in Table 3.2

3.2.3. Congregational Surveys

In considering how the research proceeded, it is well here to reproduce from chapter one the questions the research sets out to answer, viz.

1. What are the key individual and collective characteristics of members of holistic congregations?
2. How do those individual and collective characteristics differ from those of members of non-holistic congregations?
3. What conclusions may be drawn from identified characteristics in terms of the development of congregational ethos?
4. To what extent are the various characteristics reproducible?

Clearly, questions one and two must be answered before questions three and four can be addressed. The strategy this research took to answer questions one and two was to compare and contrast data from congregations identified as holistic and those identified as non-holistic. This required the development of the survey instrument, the *Church and Ministry Involvement Questionnaire* (Appendix 2).

Initially, the instrument was a compilation of questions from Ammerman (1997: 371-380 and 1998:241-253), and Unruh (not dated), plus a number of additional questions thought to be helpful in identifying individual community-engagement motivation. Consultation with the University of Georgia department of Statistics led to extensive re-writing and consolidation of questions, which helped reduce the unwieldy 200+ initial question group first to a more streamlined forty-seven questions and ultimately to a survey instrument consisting of just twenty-one questions focusing on

those aspects of demographics, attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs thought most likely to influence community engagement motivation and practices.

3.2.4 Application

Meetings with the pastoral leadership of the participating churches were then undertaken to explain fully the purpose of the survey, answer any questions related to it, and discuss methods of getting the survey into the hands of – and completed surveys returned from – as many members of the church family as possible. To this end, several different strategies were undertaken intended to produce the highest possible response from each church. The leading method was to offer the survey form along with worship bulletins to every adult attendee at every service on a given Sunday. At the commencement of each service the worship leader would refer to the surveys, give some background to the study, and emphasize that to complete and return the surveys was a ministry not only to the researcher but to the church, because survey results would be made available to the church as a tool for future development. (Additional surveys were available for those who became interested in participating in the study once they became aware of its nature and purpose but who had declined to take one as they came into the church.) The same announcement was made the following Sunday, but rather than being handed out with bulletins, surveys were distributed by ushers to congregants identifying themselves as not having received a survey, but willing to complete one. Additional copies were kept in or near the church office.

A second method of distribution and collection of surveys added to the worship-service method just described by having Sunday school leaders physically hand out survey forms in their classes, allow time for their completion and then gather completed

surveys and returning them to the church office. Although in the case of these first two distribution methods each survey had a “deadline” for return, in order to maximize responses two Sundays beyond the deadline were generally permitted for late returns.

A third method involved an after-worship Sunday brunch held at the church and attended by a representative cross-section of the church family. The advantage was that surveys could be explained, distributed, completed and returned in short order. The downside was that, although the survey was announced in the bulletin and from the pulpit and all members of the church were invited to participate, not all members had an opportunity to complete the survey. In all instances, completed surveys were collected at the church and returned in bulk for tabulation. The distribution and return numbers for the surveys is shown in Table 3.3.

While the objective data the survey approach provides is important to the process of quantitative analysis it is also, by its nature, somewhat limited in terms of giving an overall representation of a given church’s character or ethos. A great deal more information regarding congregational ethos and character can be gleaned through interviews with the pastoral leaders and members and active non-members of participating churches. Therefore, at the same time as survey instruments were being completed, such interviews were undertaken within the congregations studied. While all interviews generally followed the basic qualitative interview question set (see Appendix 3), the interviewer was not severely constrained by the questions. Rather, every opportunity was taken to explore answers or allusions that gave promise of useful insight to church or congregational praxis vis-à-vis community engagement. All interviews were recorded on magnetic tape and supported with additional, handwritten notes.

TABLE 3.1

RANKED LISTING OF CHURCHES RESPONDING TO PRELIMINARY SURVEY

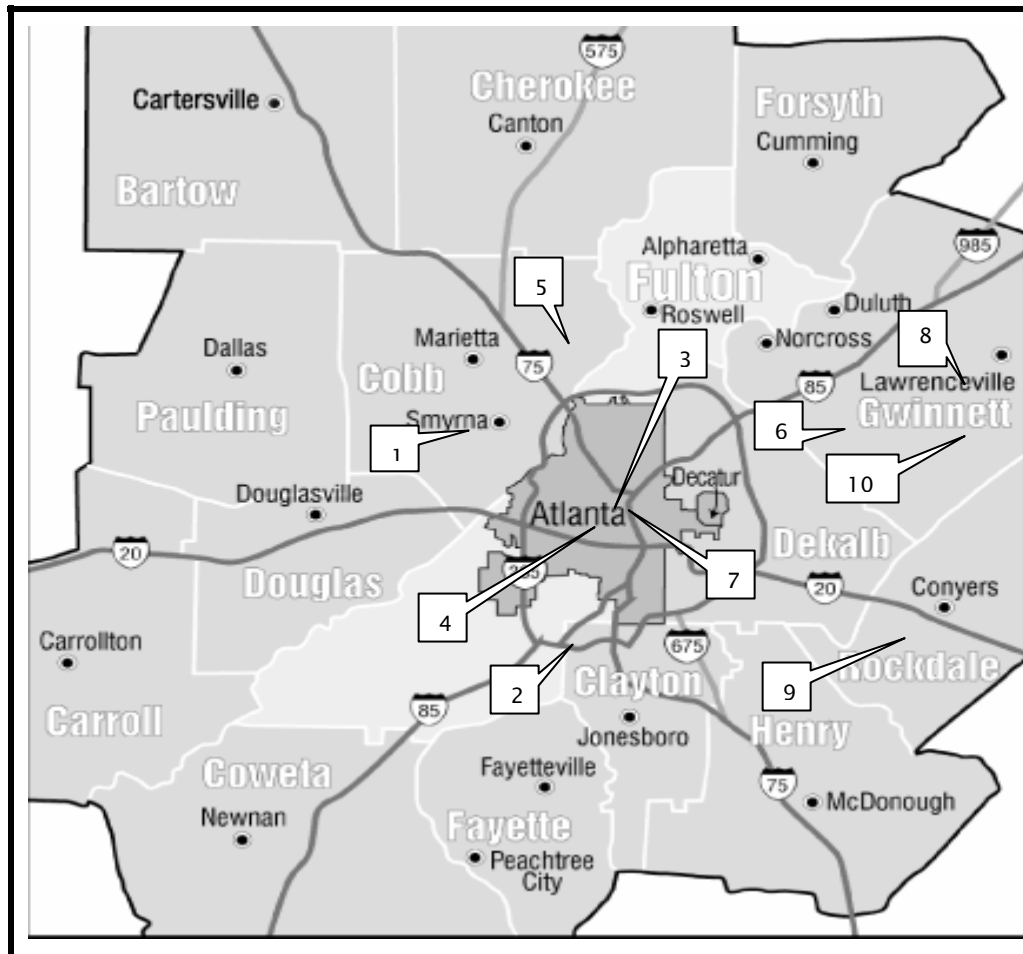
Survey Question → Type of ministry* →	1	2	3																	4	5	6	Min Score	NUMBER OF MINISTRIES				
CHURCH			b	k	q	l	p	a	m	r	e	s	i	c	d	j	o	h	n	g	f							
Christian Fellowship Baptist	6	6	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		5	5	5	21	15(++)		
Druid Hills Baptist	4	4	x	x	x	x			x	x	x	x	x	x								6	5	5	20	11		
Trinity Presbyterian Church	6	7	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x								4	4	4	19	15		
East Cobb UMC	5	4	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x									4	5	6	19	12		
Trinity Baptist Church	3	6	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x											4	4	5	19	10		
Zion Missionary Baptist Church	6	7	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x							3	4	4	18	14		
Greater Piney Grove Baptist	6	5	x	x	x			x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x			3	5	4	17	14		
All Saints Episcopal	6	3	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x								5	5	4	17	12		
Central Presbyterian	5	5	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x								3	5	3	16	15(++)		
Hillside Presbyterian	3	6	x	x	x	x	x			x	x	x										x	4	4	2	16	12	
St. Luke's Episcopal	6	6	x	x	x	x			x	x	x	x	x									1	5	4	16	12		
Oakhurst Presbyterian	4	4	x		x		x	x		x	x	x	x									x	5	3	3	15	13	
St. James Episcopal	5	7	x	x	x	x			x	x	x	x	x									2	1	5	15	11		
First Presbyterian ATL	6	4	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x						4	2	3	13	15(+)		
Lutheran Church of the Redeem	6	3	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x											x	2	5	3	13	14	
First Baptist Atlanta	6	4	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x								3	2	4	13	11		
Roswell Presbyterian	6	4	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x										3	3	3	13	10		
Second Ponce deLeon Baptist	6	3	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x											x	3	2	2	10	11	
////////////////////////////////////	////	////	////	////	////	////	////	////	////	////	////	////	////	////	////	////	////	////	////	////	////	////	////	////	////	////	////	////
New Jerusalem Baptist	3	7	x	x	x	x				x	x	x										5	5	5	22	7		
Marietta Alliance Church	4	7	x	x	x																	2	6	6	21	7		
Eastminster Presbyterian	5	6	x	x		x	x	x														x	4	5	5	20	7	
New Birth Missionary Baptist	6	7	x	x			x	x	x													x	3	3	6	19	8	
Church at Chapel Hill	4	6	x	x		x																	3	5	5	19	3	
College Park Presbyterian	3	4	x	x	x					x	x	x	x										4	5	5	18	7	
Good Shepherd Presbyterian	5	5	x	x		x																x	3	5	5	18	6	
Morningstar Church Atlanta	3	7			x	x	x															x	4	2	5	18	5	
Marietta Pilgrimage UCC	3	4	x				x	x	x													x	3	6	5	18	5	
New Hope United Methodist	4	5	x	x			x	x	x													x	3	5	4	17	7	
Crossview Baptist Church	2	6		x	x																	x	4	3	4	17	3	
Peachtree City Christian Church	5	3	x	x		x	x	x	x													x	3	5	5	16	9	
St. Andrews Presbyterian	5	4	x	x				x		x													3	4	5	16	5	
South Gwinnett Baptist	3	6	x		x																	x	1	4	5	16	3	
Norcross Presbyterian Church	3	5	x			x	x																4	3	4	16	3	
Church of Christ - Peachtree Cnr	3	7	x	x		x	x	x	x													x	3	2	3	15	8	
Chestnut Grove Baptist Church	4	6	x				x	x	x													x	3	3	3	15	6	
Mountain Park First Baptist	6	5	x	x	x		x		x	x												x	3	3	3	14	9	
Northwest Presbyterian	4	4	x	x		x	x			x	x												x	4	3	3	14	7
Peachtree Corners Baptist	6	6	x		x	x	x															x	3	3	2	14	6	
Stone Mountain First UMC	4	4	x	x																		x	2	4	4	14	3	
Mount Moriah Baptist	5	4	x	x	x	x	x	x	x													x	3	3	3	13	9	
Heritage Baptist	3	6			x		x	x	x													x	5	1	1	13	5	
St Mark UMC	6	3	x	x		x		x		x												x	2	3	4	12	7	
New Hope Baptist Church	3	7	x	x			x		x													x	1	2	2	12	5	
Holt Road Baptist	4	3	x																			x	1	2	6	12	3	
Riverdale Presbyterian	2	5				x																x	1	2	4	12	2	
Allen Temple United Methodist	3	3			x					x													6	1	1	11	2	
Advent Lutheran Church ELCA	2	7			x																	x	1	1	1	10	3	
Cumberland United Methodist	4	2	x		x																	x	1	3	3	9	4	
Norton Park Baptist	4	2	x	x																		x	1	3	3	9	3	
Cokesbury UMC	2	3	x	x	x					x	x	x											4	-	-	7	6	
Greater Mount Pleasant Baptist	4	1	x	x	x					x	x												1	1	1	4	5	
FREQUENCY			45	40	34	29	32	29	30	25	23	19	19	19	17	15	12	13	10	6	4					420		

Legend: (++) = "Substantially more than 15 ministries"
 (+) = "More than 15 ministries"

* Note that in this table, ministries have been ranked left to right in order of frequency of response.

TABLE 3.2

APPROXIMATE LOCATIONS OF CHURCHES PARTICIPATING IN THE STUDY



Legend

1. Norton Park Baptist Church
2. Christian Fellowship Baptist Church
3. St. Mark United Methodist Church
4. Central Presbyterian Church
5. East Cobb United Methodist
6. St. Andrews Presbyterian
7. Druid Hills Baptist Church
8. Chestnut Grove Baptist Church
9. Trinity Baptist Church
10. South Gwinnett Baptist Church

TABLE 3.3

SURVEY DISTRIBUTION AND RETURN DATA

Church name	Distributed	Returned	% Return
Christian Fellowship	250	96	38.4
Central Presbyterian	100	82	82
East Cobb UMC	350	109	31
Druid Hills Baptist	165	42	25.5
Trinity Baptist	150	45	30
Holistic Total	1,115	374	33.5
St. Andrews Presbyterian	270	51	18.9
St. Mark UMC	225	67	29.8
Chestnut Grove Baptist	175	37	21
Norton Park Baptist	75	32	42.7
South Gwinnett Baptist	75	25	33.3
Non-holistic Total	820	212	25.9
Combined Total	1,935	586	30.3