

# Urban population crunch prompts crowds in church

July 20, 2007  
Posted: 7/20/07

## Urban population crunch prompts crowds in church

**By Jennifer Koons**

*Religion News Service*

WASHINGTON (RNS)—Predictions that increased urbanization around the world would lead to a more secularized society are unfounded, and in fact the opposite may be true, according to a new report from the [United Nations Population Fund](#).

“Rapid urbanization was expected to mean the triumph of rationality, secular values and the demystification of the world, as well as the relegation of religion to a secondary role,” the report said. “Instead, there has been a renewal in religious interest in many countries.”

---

The global population influx into urban centers has produced an increased interest in religion—just the opposite of expectations. (United Nations / RNS)

George Martine, a demographer and the chief author of the report, said the renewed religious fervor has been spurred by the increasing waves of immigrants flooding major cities around the globe.

“It’s a noticeable fact that people in cities nowadays tend to find in religion a new form of belonging,” he said, pointing to the immigrant experience in European cities as an example.

“In Europe, urbanization was initially marked by a growing labor movement,” he said. “The labor movement gave (new immigrants) solidarity and promise. But since the labor movement has basically been eroded by globalization ... religion is fulfilling much the same kind of role.”

The report found that 3.3 billion people—more than half the world’s population—live in urban areas. That figure is expected to grow to 5 billion by 2030.

The growth particularly is sharp in the Third World, which also is the fastest-growing segment of global Christianity. By 2030, Asia's urban population will nearly double, to 2.64 billion. Africa's will grow from 294 million to 742 million, and Latin America and the Caribbean will grow from 394 million to 609 million.

But the growth is not centered in the so-called "mega-cities" such as Mexico City. In fact, more than half of the world's urban population lives in cities of 500,000 or less—about the size of Washington, D.C.

Not everyone, however, agrees with the report's findings on religion. Todd Johnson, director of the [Center for the Study of Global Christianity](#) at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in Massachusetts, said cities serve more as a connecting point than an origin.

"I think the revivals tend to be rural and in smaller cities," Johnson said. "But the way in which these revivals are connecting with the rest of the world is through the global cities."

Johnson objected to the report's use of "resurgence," which he characterized as a "sound bite" to describe what he said was a much more nuanced issue.

"The term 'resurgence' is a way for secular people to talk about the rest of the world," Johnson said. "Many reports that came out in 1960s and 1970s argued that religion wasn't going to exist in the year 2000. And that's the resurgence that everyone's talking about."

Johnson did point to one part of the world where he said "resurgence" would be an appropriate descriptor—Eastern Europe.

"The collapse of the Soviet Union has caused a true resurgence of religion," he said. "There are many more Christians, Muslims and other religionists in Eastern Europe as a result of the fall of communism. And many more

nonreligionists and atheists in China, where communism still exists today.”

News of religion, faith, missions, Bible study and Christian ministry among Baptist churches, in Texas, the BGCT, the nation and around the world.