

Ways to engage a changing suburb

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Suburbs are changing ethnically and socioeconomically, creating ministry opportunities and challenges for churches across the country. Here are some tips from leaders about engaging changing neighborhoods effectively for Christ.

- **Get the facts.** Perception doesn't always match reality. Discover who is living in the neighborhood. Look at statistical information on demographics. Visit with the principal of the nearest elementary school. Elementary schools typically are among the best sources of demographic information because they cover small geographic areas, and principals can help churches understand what new populations are starting to come through the school system. Elementary schools also can provide information about what languages are being spoken in children's homes.
- **Build relationships.** Once a church understands who is living in a neighborhood, members and leaders can begin building relationships with new groups. Is there a new ethnic restaurant in the area? Get to know the owners. Is there an ethnic community group? Get to know the leaders. Discover their needs and ways a congregation might be able to help them.
- **Pray.** Let God guide a congregation. Allow God to give it a vision for ministry.
- **Educate.** Church leaders need to communicate what diversity truly means to a community. Explain the benefits and opportunities of living in a diverse area. Discuss how God calls each Christian to be a missionary and calls his followers to minister in specific locations. Cast a vision that includes how a church is going to minister in a diverse setting.

- **Act intentionally.** God calls Christians to make disciples, so get after it. Stick to executing the church's vision for ministry. Working through relationships, there will be unexpected surprises and setbacks. Methods may need to be tweaked along the way. In the end, the church will learn from serving a diverse population and will have the opportunity to share the hope of Christ with people who have yet to embrace it.

Looking for a partner on the journey? For practical help, cross-cultural training, encouragement and support, call (888) 244-9400.

Sources: *Patty Lane, BGCT director of intercultural ministries; Robert Creech, Truett Seminary professor of Christian ministries and director of pastoral ministries.*