

Illinois

Illinois Religious Landscape

- At least two-thirds of Illinois' 13 million people don't know Jesus Christ, with almost 2 million of these residents from outside the U.S. And according to a report in the *Chicago Tribune*, there are now more Muslims in Illinois than Southern Baptists, with Islam being one of the fastest growing religions here.
- The Joshua Project is an organization geared towards identifying unreached people groups across the globe. Currently, out of 16,818 groups worldwide, 6,596 of them are still unreached, or 41.4%. Although many Christians in the U.S. like to think this is a problem only in other countries, the truth is we have people in our own state of Illinois who either haven't heard of the name of Jesus Christ, or who have been introduced to Christianity but are still in great need of spiritual renewal and commitment to biblical faith. Such as:
 - Lithuanians
 - Sorbs, Lower Lusatian
 - Chaldeans
 - Palestinian Arabs
 - Serbs
 - Bulgarians
 - Flemings
 - Bosniaks
 - Anglo-Romanis

Nones in Illinois

- A comparison of two Pew Research studies showed a drop from 78.4% to 70.6% between 2007 and 2014 in the percentage of adults (age 18 and older) in the United States who describe themselves as Christians. Oppositely, the percentage of Americans claiming to be unaffiliated—describing themselves as atheist, agnostic, or as a “none”—jumped more than six points across the country from 16.1% to 22.8%.

According to thomrainer.com, the total number of “nones” in America is 46 million adults. This number also includes 13 million people who identify themselves as agnostic and atheist. The remaining 33 million simply say they have no religious affiliation.

In Illinois, 22% of those surveyed fell into this “none” category, meaning they do not identify with any religion. In this group, 32% were between the ages of 18-29 and 40% were between the ages of 30-49, with only 28% over the age of 50.

Furthermore, 63% of this group was comprised of men, compared to only 37% of the “nones” in our state being women.

Just because one is unaffiliated with religion, though, doesn't mean they don't believe in God. Out of the 22% of religiously unaffiliated polled in Illinois in 2014:

- 29% are certain God is real
- 22% are fairly certain God is real
- 10% believe in God but aren't at all certain
- <1% aren't sure if they believe in God
- 33% do not believe in God
- 6% other

According to Ed Stetzer, for many of these people, “the cultural cost of calling yourself ‘Christian’ is starting to outweigh the cultural benefit, so those who do not identify as a ‘Christian’ according to their convictions are starting to identify as ‘nones’ because it’s more culturally savvy.”

So how do we reach this diverse, questioning, skeptical group of people living in our state? Because in reality, a very small percentage of them are fully atheistic. A large majority simply aren't sure about what they believe and are trying to make up their mind.

In order to reach these people, said Stetzer, we need to be cultural engagers. “Cultural engagers are those who believe we must understand the people around us in order to meaningfully engage them for the cause of Christ.” With the broad range of religious beliefs that “nones” fall into, it's crucial for individuals and churches to be actively engaging in getting to know these people on a personal level so that we know how best to share the gospel with them.

Research shows that people long for community and a deeper purpose than themselves. So although there's no black-and-white fix for reaching every “none,” if you are a church that loves its members and community well, you're off to a great start.

<http://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/state/illinois/>

<http://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/state/illinois/religious-tradition/unaffiliated-religious-nones/>

<http://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape/>

<http://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2015/may/nominals-to-nones-3-key-takeaways-from-pews-religious-lands.html>

<http://www1.cbn.com/cbnnews/us/2017/january/the-nones-ndash-understanding-and-reaching-those-who-step-away-from-church>

<http://thomrainer.com/2012/11/churches-that-reach-the-nones-nominals-and-nomads/>

Northwest Illinois

- In Illinois, the greatest need for more churches is in the northwest region, specifically in the Quad Cities, where 42% of people are unchurched.
- Many counties in our state don't have a single evangelical church. Most of them in Northwest Illinois.

What works when evangelizing?

- In an article titled, "How Do We Get at Effective Outreach?" author and speaker, Ed Stetzer, lays out three ways churches need to make shifts in order to be more effective at evangelism:
 1. Shift from a temple mindset to a network mindset: the argument here is that although it is good and necessary to invite people to church, the "temple," it's important not to solely rely on this method of evangelism. Stetzer encourages church leader to equip their congregations to be sharing the gospel with their "network" every day—their neighbors, co-workers, family and friends.
 2. Shift from an attractional mindset to an incarnational mindset: While attractional elements are not bad and can be quite effective in the right context—such as at VBS or at a church picnic, etc.—churches need to make sure the *main* attraction for attending is the incarnational presence of Christ. As Stetzer put it, "In essence, teaching and equipping our people about the implications of the gospel lived out in real life is the true attraction."
 3. Shift from traditional forms and structures to innovative ones: "As the mission field changes," Stetzer wrote, "churches will change... In other words, churches will continue to have the marks of a biblical church, but those marks might be lived out in a restaurant, pub, coffee house, movie theater, community center, or network of homes." Take pastor Levi Hart for example. Hart and his wife planted Ignite Church in Breese, Ill. that meets every Sunday at a local bar—by no means a traditional location. But with more than 20 people accepting Christ in the church's first three months, it's obvious that going against the grain has allowed Ignite to reach people that perhaps never would have stepped foot into a traditional church building.

<http://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2017/june/how-do-we-get-at-effective-outreach.html>

Reaching kids, teens and young adults

- Evangelism ideas for reaching young kids include:
 - Starting an afterschool Bible club at your church or at a school
 - Hold the occasional Saturday morning event at your church for the kids in your community, like a breakfast or service project.

- Start a neighborhood bus or carpool ministry to pick up children for church on Sunday who wouldn't have a ride otherwise.
 - Hold a Vacation Bible School during the summer.
 - Take advantage of holidays, hosting themed parties for kids to come to where the gospel is shared.
- How to be a church that reaches teens and young adults:
 - Be contemporary and culturally engaged: be aware of the current culture and social trends, just as teens and young adults are.
 - Be authentic: young adults often desire open and transparent leadership. They want to know that their pastor isn't perfect, and would rather hear about his weaknesses and struggles with life and faith. This allows them to feel connected to a church body and feel like they belong there.
 - Care for the hurting: many young people today are concerned with humanitarian efforts and caring for those who are marginalized or considered outcasts. And they will gravitate to churches doing the same.

<http://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2014/september/how-to-effectively-reach-and-retain-millennials.html>