

Chicago

In Scripture, the Great Commission tells Christians to “go and make disciples of all nations.” Living in Illinois, we are privileged to have many of the world’s nations within driving distance...

In one the highest populated, most ethnically diverse, yet spiritually lost cities in the entire country... Chicago.

According to the North American Mission Board, in Chicago:

- Only 10% of the population is affiliated with an evangelical church.
- There are only 256 Southern Baptist churches for the more than 8 million people in the greater Chicagoland area, making the need for increased evangelism and church planting efforts crucial.
- There is currently only 1 SBC church for every 35,105 people who live there.
- In order to have adequate church resources for every resident, 184 churches need to be planted there in the coming 5 years.

The city of Chicago is home to over 2.7 million people who live in the Windy City’s 77 distinct community areas. But the greater Chicagoland area, including suburbs, is comprised of 9.4 million people living in more than 200 neighborhoods.

Of the 2.7 million people residing in Metro Chicago, there are over 20 unique ethnic groups that fall into the following categories:

- 45% are white (31.7% non-Hispanic whites)
- 32.9% are black or African American
- 13.4% Other
- 5.5% are Asian
- 2.7% are from two or more races
- 0.5% are American Indian

With an ever-growing number of people, comes an increased need for the gospel and for churches and individuals to get serious about evangelism efforts. Although the big city of Chicago can seem intimidating at first, many have found Chicago residents to be open to hearing about Jesus.

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/>

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