

Three crossings of
data that was already
sitting there, and
what fell out of them.

AN ANALYSIS

The desert moved to the *growth edge*

We went looking for where the gospel is
thinnest in America. We did not expect
the answer to be the new subdivision.

METHOD

Three joins over committed
national caches. Nothing
new collected.

UNIVERSE

83,316 tracts, 98.7% of
the national index.

INSTRUMENTS

GDI, GIM v3 and MVI,
crossed three ways.

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Three questions, asked separately of data we already had. They turned out to answer each other.

Everything here comes from national data that has been sitting in the GospelGraph repository for months, each layer built for a different page and never joined to the others. Nothing new was collected. The three crossings were picked off a longer list of seven.

The figures that carry the argument.

For twenty years the picture of a gospel desert in this country has been an urban one. A block of vacant storefronts, a church building sold and turned into apartments, a neighborhood the denomination left in 1974 and never came back to. That picture is not wrong. It is just no longer where the numbers point hardest.

2,168

OPENING DESERTS

Tracts measurably improving, at worst-tier access, with a built form that can hold a gathering.

3,160

HARDENING BESIDE A CHURCH

Tracts getting worse at the same access floor, with a congregation already inside them.

3 of 30

HOUSEHOLD TYPES REACHED

The only guides scarce among both kinds of unreached tract.

I THREE INSTRUMENTS, AND WHAT EACH ONE REFUSES TO SAY

Each measures something the other two cannot see.

The **Gospel Desert Index** is a standing level. It scores structural gospel access from nought to a hundred, where higher means less access, and it counts congregations, their distance from the tract line, and the conditions of the households around them. It says how things are. It says nothing about direction.

The **Gospel Impact Metric** is the direction. Its newer long-baseline form fits a trend across twelve overlapping five-year windows rather than differencing two eras, which cuts the noise by roughly two thirds. Its most important feature is the one that makes it less exciting: it will decline to answer. When the fit cannot separate rising from falling, it reports **holding**, and

Three separate questions were asked of data that already existed. The first asks where the ground is measurably getting better while gospel access stays worst-tier. The second asks what any of this looks like when you stop describing places by eleven-digit census numbers and start using the names people actually say. The third asks which kinds of households stay unreached, and whether they are unreached in the same way.

The three were run independently, by different joins, over different columns. All three land on the same ground: subdivisions, exurbs and university towns that were fields fifteen years ago and now hold ten thousand households and one church.

holding is not a finding that the tract has held steady. It is a statement that the direction is not established. Twenty-six thousand tracts sit there, and they are excluded from everything below.

The **Missional Viability Index** asks a question neither of the others can: whether there is anywhere to meet. Third places, street intersections, public rooms. A tract can be opening and unreached and still be a place where nobody can gather anybody, because there is no room and no corner and no reason to stop walking.

Cross the three and you get a claim none of them makes alone. The ground is improving. Access is still among the worst in the country. And the built form could hold a congregation if one existed.

An unresolved direction is not an established one. A measure that will not decline to answer is not measuring anything.

II WHERE THE GROUND IS OPENING AND NOBODY IS THERE

Thirty-nine thousand tracts are confirmed opening. Two thousand of them are also deserts with somewhere to meet.

Across the analysis universe, **38,849 tracts are confirmed opening** on the long baseline. That is a large number and on its own it is not very useful; most of those tracts already have churches, or are comfortable, or both. Hold them to Arid or Desert access and an MVI above the midpoint, and **2,168 remain**.

Then read the list.

THE STEEPEST TEN • CONFIRMED OPENING, GDI 60 OR WORSE, MVI 50 OR BETTER

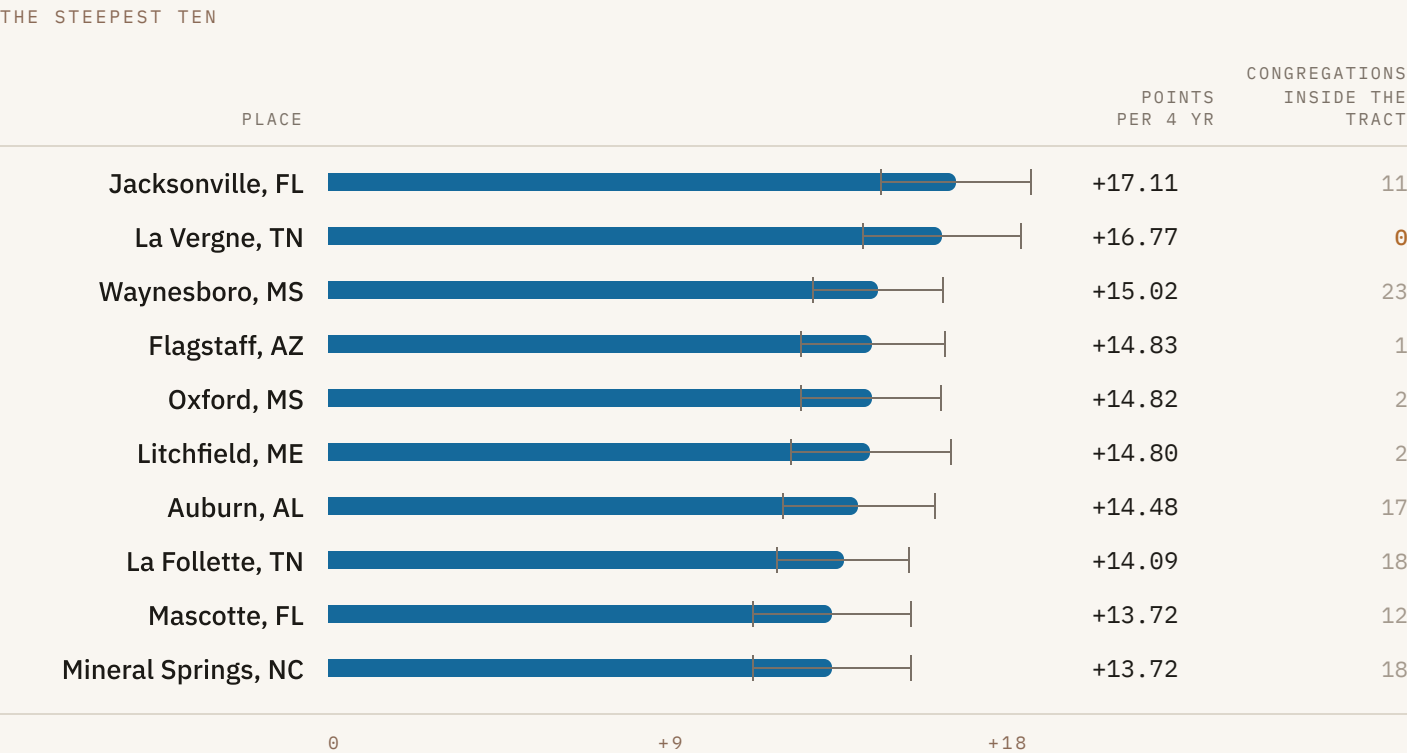
PLACE	GDI	MVI	SHALOM PER 4YR	CHURCHES	DOMINANT HOUSEHOLD GUIDE
Jacksonville, FL	66.7	68	+17.11 ±2.06	11	Working New-Subdivision Families
La Vergne, TN	74.0	58	+16.77 ±2.20	0	Working New-Subdivision Families
Waynesboro, MS	64.5	60	+15.02 ±1.82	23	Cost-Pressed Family Suburbs
Flagstaff, AZ	64.3	66	+14.83 ±1.99	1	Affluent New-Build Families
Oxford, MS	65.0	54	+14.82 ±1.93	2	Multifamily First-Timers
Litchfield, ME	62.6	63	+14.80 ±2.21	2	Exurban Working Homeowners
Auburn, AL	62.3	51	+14.48 ±2.11	17	Affluent New-Build Families
La Follette, TN	65.0	60	+14.09 ±1.84	18	Exurban Working Homeowners
Mascotte, FL	71.4	52	+13.72 ±2.18	12	Exurban Working Homeowners
Mineral Springs, NC	61.2	70	+13.72 ±2.19	18	Exurban Working Homeowners

Places named from the curated place-label index. Shalom movement is the long-baseline fit, in composite points per four years, with its standard error.

Ten places, drawn from two thousand.

These are the steepest risers among the 2,168 tracts that are opening, dry and able to host a gathering at once. The blue bar is the Shalom composite each one gained per four years. The thin line drawn through it is the margin of error on that estimate, and on this page every one of those ranges clears zero by a wide margin.

Read the two columns on the right together.



Four of ten hold two churches or fewer.

The right-hand column runs 0, 1, 2, 2 at one end of the list and 23 at the other, and nothing in it tracks the length of the bar beside it. Four of these ten tracts hold two congregations or fewer while the ground under them rises faster than anywhere else in the country.

La Vergne, second on the list, holds none. It is a Nashville commuter suburb, and it reads 74 on access, the worst figure on the page. The improvement is real, and there is no congregation inside the tract to be part of it.

Not one of these is an inner city.

Jacksonville is on the list, but not the Jacksonville anyone pictures: this is a tract on its southern build-out, eleven congregations, access still Arid, and the fastest confirmed improvement in the country at that access level. Flagstaff and Auburn and Oxford are university towns whose edges filled in. La Vergne is a Nashville commuter suburb whose tract holds no congregation at all and reads 74 on access, the worst figure on the page. Mascotte and Davenport sit on the Orlando build-out. Greer is on the I-85 corridor between Greenville and Spartanburg.

Now read the last column, which is the one that matters. Working New-Subdivision Families. Affluent New-Build Families. Exurban Working Homeowners. Cost-Pressed Family Suburbs. These are not the household types anyone means by the phrase *unreached*. They are the household types that show up in a church growth seminar as the target audience.

That is the problem. A subdivision built in 2014 has no church in it because nothing was in it. There was no congregation to leave and no denomination to blame. Ten thousand households arrived over eight years into a place with a road, a school and a grocery store, and the ordinary mechanism by which a neighborhood acquires a church, which is somebody already being there, never ran.

What the field guide for these households already says, before any of this analysis existed.

What it asks of whoever goes

The household guide for the type that tops this list opens with a sentence worth reading twice: *four in five of these houses went up since 2000, so there is no history here, no institutions, and nobody older to ask.* That is the pastoral situation in one line, and it is not the situation most training prepares anyone for.

Consider what is absent. There is no matriarch who knows everyone, no funeral home that has buried three generations, no high school with alumni still nearby, no lapsed member who could be visited, and no building with a name on it. A planter arriving in an old neighborhood inherits a set of relationships, most of them complicated; a planter arriving here inherits nothing at all, including the complications.

That cuts both ways and the good half is real. Nothing has to be repaired. Nobody remembers the last church that failed here, because there was not one. Everybody on the street is also new, which is the single condition under which a stranger is not a stranger. It does not last. The window in which a whole neighborhood is simultaneously looking for people closes within a few years of build-out, and it closes quietly.

The bad half is that the ordinary tools do not work. There is no crowd to join, because there is no place where this neighborhood is ever gathered. The guide names the one exception, and it is worth taking literally: **the pickup line at three o'clock.** Fifteen minutes standing there weekly beats any invitation anyone could send, because it is the only time these households are out of their cars and in the same place.

And the economics are misread almost every time. A median household income near a hundred thousand dollars, in a place like this, is servicing a new mortgage, two cars, childcare and a fifty-minute commute. The guide's warning is blunt: *upper-middle income here does not mean slack.* Two commutes and small children squeeze the usable evening down to about ninety minutes. A church that schedules a Wednesday programme at seven is not competing with apathy. It is competing with the drive home.

The practical consequences are unglamorous and specific. Move everything to half past eight in the evening or to Saturday morning. Pick one gathering on one date and hold it, unchanged, for three years, because a place with no institutions cannot tell the difference between a church and a pop-up until something has survived long enough to be predictable. Find the households who arrived in phase one and give

III THE MIRROR, WHICH IS THE HARDER PAGE

Where a church is present and the ground is still getting worse.

Run the same crossing the other direction. Confirmed *hardening*, same access floor: **3,875 tracts**. Of those, **3,160 of them, eighty-two percent, already have a congregation inside them.**

This is not a planting list. A planter sent into one of these tracts would be the second or third church on the block, and the second or third church on the block is not what the data is asking for. What it is asking is a question nobody enjoys: there is a church here, the neighborhood is measurably getting worse, and those two facts have been true at the same time for a decade.

The opening list is two thousand invitations. This one is three thousand conversations, and they are conversations with people who are already tired.

The number does not say the church caused the hardening, or that a different church would have prevented it. Some of these congregations are the only thing keeping the tract from falling faster. What it says is narrower and still uncomfortable: presence and access are not the same thing, and we have three thousand

them real information to pass on, because in a neighborhood with no memory the earliest residents are the closest thing to elders it has.

And do not admire the commute. The guide is precise about why: calling a man's fifty-minute drive heroic makes it harder for him to say that it is grinding him down.

places where the first exists and the second is going backwards.

What it asks of whoever is already there

There is a particular cruelty in handing this number to a pastor who has been faithful in a hard place for fifteen years. Read carelessly it says: you were here and it got worse. That is not what it says, and anyone who presents it that way has misunderstood both the measurement and the ministry.

What the number does say is that faithfulness and outcome came apart. Those are different things, and the whole Protestant tradition insists they are different things, right up until the moment somebody produces a chart. The pastor of a hardening tract has usually been doing the work. The work was not sufficient to hold back what was moving, and it was never going to be, because a congregation is not a labour market or a housing policy.

The honest pastoral use of this list is not evaluation. It is *company*. Three thousand congregations are in the same position, which means no individual pastor in one of them is the anomaly they probably believe they are. That is the first thing to say to anyone on this list, and it should be said before any number is.

The second thing is a question about posture rather than effort. A congregation that has been in a declining neighborhood for a generation usually organizes itself around holding on: keep the building, keep the schedule, keep the remaining members. Every one of those is a reasonable instinct and together they make a church that is present but no longer reachable, which is the gap between presence and access that this measurement exposes. The Sunday programme survives; the front door narrows.

The uncomfortable question, then, is not *are we faithful* but *is anything we do still addressed to the people who*

IV WHERE TWO HONEST MEASURES DISAGREE

| *Eight hundred and forty-six of the two thousand.*

There are two ways to ask whether a tract is improving. Difference the last era against the one before it, or fit a line across twelve overlapping windows. They are different questions, and on **846 of the 2,168 opening deserts they give opposite answers.**

Flagstaff reads -2.9 on the two-era delta and +14.8 on the long baseline. Both are correct. A tract that fell for six years and then recovered for three produces that

V NOBODY PRAYS FOR TRACT 24003706302

| *People pray for Eastport.*

Every figure above is attached to an eleven-digit census tract number, which is a fine thing for a database and a useless thing for a person. A pastor does not carry a burden for 24003706302. He carries one for Eastport, which is the part of Annapolis where that tract is.

Naming the ground turned out to be hard, and the reason is worth a paragraph. The federal gazetteer drops about eight named places into an average tract, and most of them are subdivision plat filings: the name on the sign at the entrance to a development, filed once

now live here. In a tract that has hardened over ten years, the households outside the doors are frequently not the households the congregation was built for. Nobody decided that. It happened at the speed of a housing market, which is faster than a church changes.

This is a longer, less satisfying assignment than planting. It has no launch date. Nobody gets sent anywhere. And it is a larger set than the opening deserts, which means any strategy consisting only of new work will never touch the majority of the problem.

pattern: the recent pair looks bad, the long line looks good.

The temptation is to pick one and call it the real number. The rule this project works under says otherwise, and it is the right rule: where the two disagree, the disagreement *is* the finding. A place that fell hard and is now climbing is a different pastoral situation from one that has been climbing steadily, and flattening them into a single figure would delete the difference that matters most to whoever is sent there.

in 1987 and known to nobody. Four separate ways of ranking those names were tried against Annapolis to find the real neighborhood among them: nearest to the tract centre, encyclopedia notability, whether a Wikipedia article exists, and the population living around each point. All four preferred *Watergate Village* and *Colonial Manor Estates* to Eastport.

The answer was to stop choosing. Where a city publishes its own neighborhood boundaries, use those. Where it does not, use what contributors have mapped, because people map the names they say out loud. Only then does a ranking of neighborhoods mean anything.

Rolled up that way and weighted by households: **6,765** 1,425 are neighborhoods rather than whole towns.
named areas carrying three tracts or more, of which

THE DRIEST NAMED NEIGHBORHOODS IN AMERICA · HOUSEHOLD-WEIGHTED, THREE TRACTS OR MORE

NEIGHBORHOOD	GDI	TRACTS	HOUSEHOLDS	CHURCHES	CONFIRMED MOVEMENT
Emery Park, Tucson AZ	73.5	3	5,106	5	1 hardening
Providence, Las Vegas NV	69.4	4	8,875	3	3 hardening
Warrendale, Detroit MI	68.2	4	5,579	13	2 opening
Devington, Indianapolis IN	67.9	3	4,102	41	1 opening
Anthem Highlands, NV	67.3	3	3,730	0	unresolved
Carver Shores, Orlando FL	67.1	4	6,629	6	1 opening
Meadowview, Sacramento CA	67.0	4	6,163	15	2 opening
Central Southwest, Houston TX	66.9	3	4,559	13	1 opening
Ironwood Terrace, AZ	66.6	4	5,526	7	1 opening
San Luis Rey, Oceanside CA	66.1	3	3,214	1	unresolved

City affiliations added by hand for readability; the index carries name and state.

Widen from neighborhoods to all named places, and the growth edge comes straight back.

The neighborhood list still reads like the old picture. Warrendale in Detroit, Carver Shores in Orlando and Central Southwest in Houston are the places a denomination would name if asked to guess. But widen the same query from neighborhoods to every named area and the top of the list changes character. Poinciana, Florida is the largest of the driest: eleven tracts, 21,527 households, forty-one churches, and a household-weighted access score of 74.9. Beside it sit Interlachen and Davenport in Florida, Knik-Fairview in Alaska, Lake Los Angeles in California, Chaparral in New Mexico, Anderson Creek in North Carolina.

Every one of them is a place that got built quickly. Several did not exist as named places within living memory.

Why the name is a pastoral question and not a formatting one

It would be easy to file the naming work under presentation. It is not. A tract number cannot be prayed for, cannot be preached about, cannot be put in a bulletin, and cannot be the thing a person says when asked where they are from. Every act of ministry that this data is meant to serve happens under a name.

There is a second-order problem, too, which the growth edge makes sharp. A neighborhood that has been named for a century has a name that means something: Eastport, Southmost, Warrendale. A subdivision has a name a developer chose to sell houses. Dunhill Meadows, Ironwood Terrace, Anthem Highlands: those names arrive before any of the shared life that usually produces one. Both kinds appear in the table above.

That is not an argument for dismissing the developer's name. People do live in Anthem Highlands and they do say so. It is an argument for noticing what a pastor is walking into: in one case a name carries a hundred

years of meaning and every possible offence, and in the other it carries a brochure. The work of turning the second into the first is most of what planting on the growth edge is.

A ranking built on the federal gazetteer would have headlined Colonial Manor Estates instead of Eastport, and no one would have noticed it was wrong.

VI TWO KINDS OF UNREACHED, AND THE READING THAT INVERTS

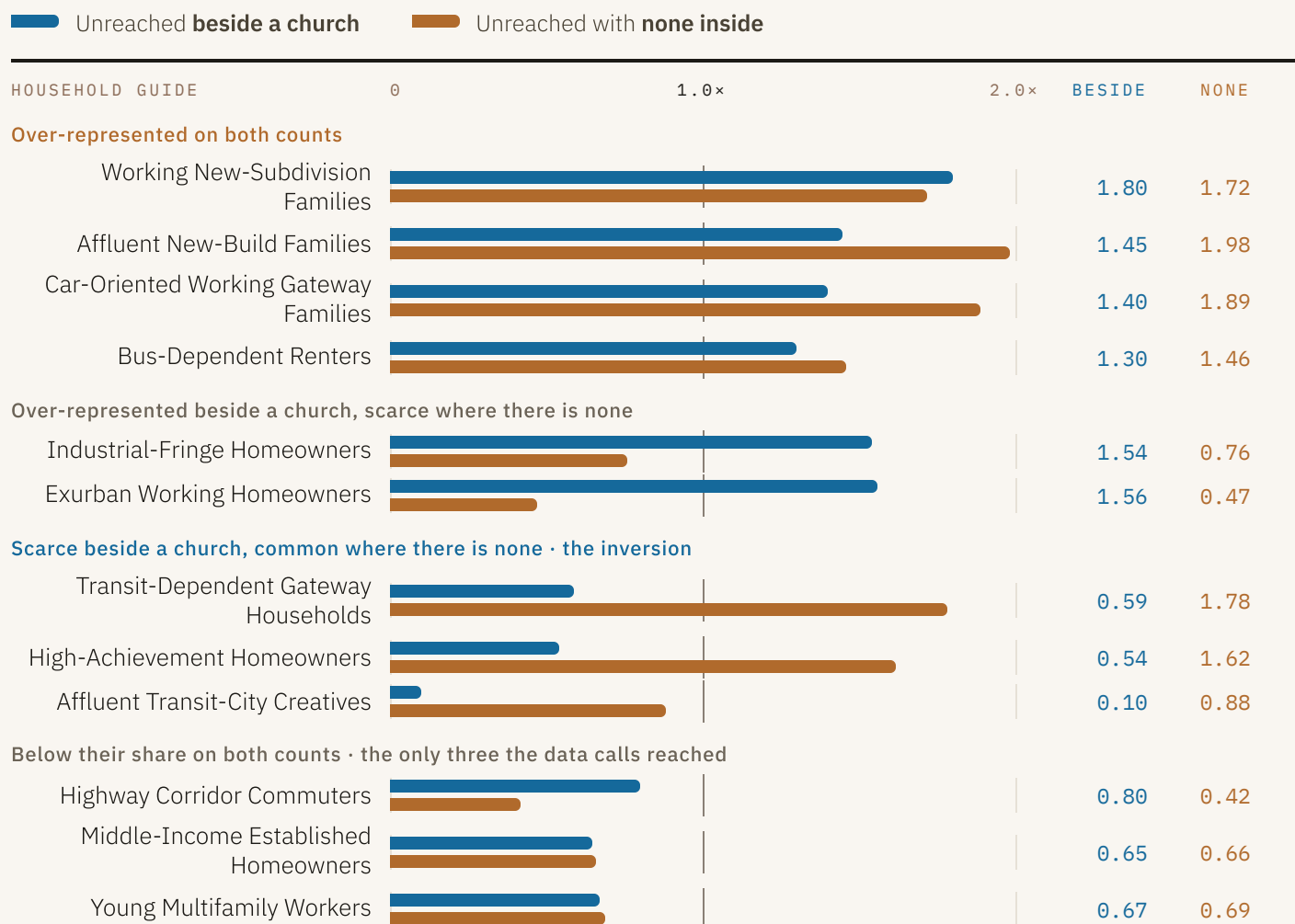
A household type can be scarce among the unreached for two opposite reasons.

The third crossing asks which of the thirty household guides stay unreached. For each guide: its share of households living in unreached tracts, divided by its share nationally. A figure above one means the type is over-represented among the unreached; below one, under-represented. Weighted by the full composition of every tract rather than its dominant type, so a tract that is sixty-forty counts as both.

The important move is splitting *unreached* into two situations that call for opposite responses. **Beside a church** means a congregation sits inside the tract and access is still Dry or worse. **None inside** means there is no congregation at all. Twenty-four thousand tracts are the first. Forty-seven hundred are the second.

Unreached splits two ways, so every household guide gets counted twice: once among the unreached living **beside a church** (24,164 tracts), once among the unreached with **no congregation inside the tract at all** (4,685 tracts).

Each bar is that guide's share of one count divided by its share of the country. The grey line sits at 1.0×, where a guide gets exactly the share its size predicts. Past the line means over-represented.



Four of twelve straddle the line.

Four guides here sit past 1.0× on one bar and short of it on the other. For those four the two counts point opposite ways, and whichever one a denomination happens to be holding decides what it believes about everyone in that row.

High-Achievement Homeowners are the clearest case, at **0.54×** on the blue bar and **1.62×** on the rust one. Three guides fall short of their share on both bars, and those three are the whole of what this data will call reached.

LIFT OVER NATIONAL SHARE · 24,164 TRACTS BESIDE A CHURCH, 4,685 WITH NONE INSIDE

HOUSEHOLD GUIDE	BESIDE A CHURCH	NONE INSIDE	NATIONAL SHARE
Working New-Subdivision Families	1.80×	1.72×	2.0%
Exurban Working Homeowners	1.56×	0.47×	13.6%
Industrial-Fringe Homeowners	1.54×	0.76×	1.7%
Affluent New-Build Families	1.45×	1.98×	2.2%
Car-Oriented Working Gateway Families	1.40×	1.89×	2.1%
Bus-Dependent Renters	1.30×	1.46×	0.5%
Transit-Dependent Gateway Households	0.59×	1.78×	1.3%
High-Achievement Homeowners	0.54×	1.62×	3.7%
Affluent Transit-City Creatives	0.10×	0.88×	1.5%
Highway Corridor Commuters	0.80×	0.42×	6.6%
Middle-Income Established Homeowners	0.65×	0.66×	2.5%
Young Multifamily Workers	0.67×	0.69×	2.2%

The last three rows are the only guides of thirty that are scarce in both columns.

Read one column and the answer reverses.

Look at High-Achievement Homeowners. Among tracts unreached beside a church they run at **0.54×** their national share, under-represented. On that column alone a denomination would conclude that its affluent professional households are covered, and move the money elsewhere.

The second column reads 1.62×

They are not reached. They are over-represented in tracts where no congregation exists at all, so they barely enter the first bucket in the first place. Their scarcity among the misaligned is not evidence of success; it is a consequence of there being nothing there to be misaligned with. Transit-Dependent Gateway Households show the same inversion more sharply still, at 0.59 beside a church and 1.78 with none.

Affluent Transit-City Creatives make the point from the other end. They read 0.10× beside a church, the lowest figure in the set by a wide margin, and 0.88× with none. That second figure is close to par. They are not nine times better reached than the average American household; they are roughly average, and the first column overstates it by about that factor.

That is a methodological point rather than a finding, and it is the one worth carrying out of this article. Any one of these tables, read alone, will tell you something confidently untrue.

Read both columns together and the shape resolves. The types over-represented among *both* kinds of unreached are the growth-edge households: new-subdivision families at 1.80 and 1.72, affluent new-build at 1.45 and 1.98, car-oriented gateway families at 1.40 and 1.89. Not unreached because a church left. Unreached because a church never arrived.

And only three guides out of thirty are scarce in both columns: Highway Corridor Commuters, Middle-Income Established Homeowners and Young Multifamily

VII WHAT THIS ASKS OF THE PEOPLE WHO GO

Five consequences, in descending order of how much they would change if anyone acted on them.

| *One.*

The sending language is aimed at a country that is shrinking

Almost every recruiting appeal in church planting is urban. The imagery is a storefront, a walk-up, a transit stop, a coffee shop with the laptops. That is a real place and a real need. It is also **eight percent of American census tracts**. Suburban and sparse-urban ground is three quarters of the country, and it is where the fastest-opening deserts are.

The consequence is not that urban work should stop. It is that a young person with a genuine call and no particular geography attached to it will hear, over and over, that the frontier is downtown, and will arrive somewhere that is already the most churchied ground in the sample. Meanwhile the subdivision an hour out, with eleven thousand households and one congregation, has nobody making a case for it because nobody has written the appeal.

Somebody has to be willing to say from a platform that the hardest and most open ground in America right now looks like a cul-de-sac.

Workers. Those three are the only household types this data is prepared to call reached.

| *Two.*

The funding clock does not match the ground

Denominational support is typically structured around a three-year runway with attendance milestones from year one. On the growth edge that is close to the worst possible arrangement. A neighborhood with no institutions has no existing crowd to draw from, which means the first two years produce relationships and almost no attendance. That is the period in which a metrics-driven funder concludes the plant is failing.

The measurement here suggests the milestones for those years should be relational and countable in a different currency: households known by name, weeks the same gathering held on the same date, phase-one residents who will pass on real information. The guide's own instruction, to hold one gathering on one date unchanged for three years, is unfundable under most current arrangements. It is also the correct instruction.

| *Three.*

Twenty-one percent of the country cannot host a conventional plant

A fifth of American tracts combine high need with low missional viability: hard conditions and nowhere to gather. No third place, no walkable intersection, no public room. The standard model of renting a space, publicizing a service and gathering a crowd assumes an infrastructure that is not present.

These places are almost never separated out when work is assigned. They get the same playbook as a tract with a main street, and they fail with it, and the failure is usually attributed to the planter. It is a category error with a human cost, and it is measurable in advance.

| *Four.*

Affluence is being mistaken for reach

High-Achievement Homeowners are under-represented among tracts unreached beside a church and over-represented among tracts with no church at all. Affluent Transit-City Creatives show the same asymmetry. The obvious reading, that these people are fine, is wrong. It is wrong in a way that is comfortable, which is why it survives.

The field guide for high-achievement households is pointed about the mechanism, and it is not about programming. It warns against taking the money first, because that is the fastest way to fund anything and it settles for good what those households are understood to be for. It warns against thanking them publicly, because gratitude from the front confirms the arrangement and makes it harder for anyone to approach them in any other role.

Its prescribed action is a rebuke to a standard practice: decline one offer of funding this quarter and ask for a year of somebody's Tuesdays instead. A church that has only ever asked wealthy households for money has not reached them. It has billed them.

| *Five.*

Two dry countries, needing opposite people

Utah and Tennessee score within a point and a half of each other on access. Forty-one percent of Utah's tracts contain no congregation; two percent of Tennessee's do. These are not variations on one problem. Utah needs presence where there is none, which is pioneer work, long and lonely and structurally under-resourced. Tennessee has a church on every corner and access that is still poor, which means the constraint is whatever is happening, or not happening, between those buildings and the people around them.

Send a pioneer to Tennessee and they will plant church number nine on a road that needed something else. Send a revitalizer to Utah and they will find nothing to revitalize. A single score cannot tell the two apart; the pair of numbers can, and it takes about four seconds to look.

| *And one thing not to do with any of it.*

There is a way of using numbers like these that does real damage, and it should be named. A pastor handed a tract score, a movement tier and a viability index can conclude that their neighborhood has been graded and that they have been graded with it. That reading is available in every figure in this article and it is false in all of them.

None of this measures faith. None of it measures whether a congregation is good, or whether a pastor is faithful, or whether the Spirit is at work on a particular street. It measures how far people are from a church, what direction the conditions around them are moving, and whether there is a room. Those are worth knowing and they are not the same as the thing everyone cares about.

Every field guide in this system carries the same line, and it is the right note to end an analysis on: *you are not the savior of your street. You are a neighbor who keeps showing up, because Someone kept showing up for you.*

VIII HOW THIS WAS MADE, AND WHAT WOULD BREAK IT

83,316 tracts, 98.7% of the national index, holding 125.7 million households. Only 1,070 fall out for carrying no access score at all. That is tier “Unscored”, a missing measurement rather than a low one. The remainder are small gaps in the composition and long-baseline joins.

Every aggregate is weighted by households, which is the convention the field reports already use. A tract of four hundred homes does not count the same as one of four thousand.

Movement is reported across two confirmed-opening tiers, **opening** and **opening_fast**, the second holding 7,666 tracts. Any ranking that reads only the first stops at about +6.8 points per four years and loses the steepest movement in the country, which is where most of the table above sits.

18,059 tracts, a fifth of the country, carry a special-context flag: campuses, senior communities, mixed and institutional populations. The map prints a caveat beside those tracts and then shows them, and this analysis counts them the same way. People live in all of them, and excluding them would drop three of the fourteen context modifiers to almost nothing.

The desert floor of 60 and the unreached cut of 55 were chosen for this analysis. Moving either moves the counts. Neither moves the direction.

The access score already counts church presence, so “a church inside and access still poor” is partly self-referential. The comparison *between* household guides survives it, because the circularity is identical for all thirty. The absolute rate is the number to distrust.

Church-plant announcements would turn crossing one from “here is where to plant” into “here is where planting actually goes”, which is the version worth publishing. A closures database crossed with trajectory would say what the years before a closure look like, and whether they can be seen coming.

One last caution.

None of this measures faith, and it should not be read as though it does. It measures access, meaning whether a congregation is near enough and stable enough to be reachable by the people living there, and it measures the movement of the conditions those people live under. A tract can be full of believers and score badly. A tract can score well and be cold.

What the numbers can do is tell you where to look, and stop you looking only where you already were.