

Church planters need partners for suburban starts

When some people fly into Chicago and look down on the patchwork of neighborhoods and villages extending to the horizon, they see multitudes of apartments and houses and people too vast to comprehend.

Dennis Conner sees opportunity.

“Part of what prompted me to come to Chicago is the great mission field that it is. Not just in scale—obviously it’s huge. And influential, throughout the nation and the world,” Conner said. “But I was drawn here because of the great diversity, the variety of people that are here, the great need for the gospel, and the opportunity for the gospel to transform this city.”

Although fairly new to Illinois, Conner understands some important things about Chicago. It’s big. It’s important. It’s diverse. And it’s not one large city.

Chicagoland is many communities. That’s what makes planting churches here challenging, but for Conner and more than a dozen church planters in the area, the calling is clear: “To transform lives, families, neighborhoods, communities, in the city and surrounding suburbs,” he emphasizes.

Of the 10 million people who live in the Chicago metropolitan area, about one million are actually in Wisconsin and Indiana. Nearly three million are in the



We serve in ... Chicago and the suburbs
Dennis and Cindy Conner came to Chicago from Arizona—in February. It’s quite a contrast from the sunny state where he planted a church and served as a church planting strategist. Now Dennis is helping planters put down roots in Chicagoland.

city itself. That means more than six million people live in the suburbs—those 200 towns and villages in 10 counties surrounding the big city.

In this kind of setting, no one type of church plant dominates. There are myriad people groups and languages. And for planters coming from other parts of the U.S., there are plenty of opportunities to minister to people who may be just like the folks back home—or very different.

“There is such huge need for partners here,” Conner said. IBSA keeps potential church planters “in the pipeline” by recruiting them and bringing them to the region for vision tours and assessment of their skills and calling. Some planting couples come with support from partnering churches, but many more would welcome spiritual encouragement from

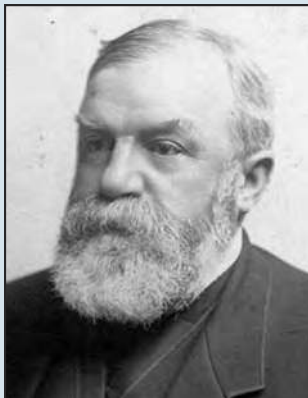
churches downstate or out-of-state.

Once they’re on the field, Conner said, “our church planters need partners to love them, to care about them, to know what’s happening, and to pray for them regularly and persistently.”

Whether planting in the city or the suburbs, missionaries need back-up. “We desperately need more laborers to come into the harvest of Chicagoland.” Contact IBSA’s Church Planting Team to learn how to partner in Chicagoland.

ChurchPlanting@IBSA.org

– Eric Reed



‘TRAIN UP A CHILD...’

When D. L. Moody arrived in Chicago in 1858, his first ministry was to children: He established a Sunday school. The traveling shoe salesman from Massachusetts set up shop on Sunday nights in an abandoned saloon, the only place he could find in the city. Soon he had to find a new location, because the first one was filled to overflowing, and then another. Moody found the way to reach the challenging city, especially in its poor and decaying neighborhoods, was through its children.

Arthur Flake had a similar idea. Starting in 1909, he led Southern Baptists to build Sunday schools to teach children and adults about the Bible. In a time when education was appreciated but not easily obtained, SBC churches became teaching centers, and the Scripture was their core curriculum.

This ministry of education may be called other things today, but it remains critical to strong faith that we know what we believe and why—starting as children.

WHAT WE BELIEVE ABOUT... EDUCATION

Read Article 12 of *The Baptist Faith & Message (2000)*, “Education,” at IBSA.org/B101.

Ever since I graduated high school fifteen years ago, my life has not strayed very far from college campuses. First, there was my undergraduate experience. Then, there were a couple years of graduate study. I followed that with seven years as a campus minister. And now, I enjoy the privilege of helping churches across our state to make disciples among the nearly one million students in Illinois.

During these years, it has been common for me to encounter professors and students who dismiss biblical claims as the superstitious beliefs of the unenlightened. In other words, they think no educated person would dare ascribe to the supernatural and moral teachings of Christianity.

In all honesty, these “enlightened” individuals may have come to this conclusion in part because they’ve not encountered well-thinking Christians. Perhaps they had encountered too many professing Christians who had not taken seriously enough Jesus’ command to love God with all their minds.

That is why I am particularly thankful for this line in *The Baptist Faith & Message* article on Education: “In Jesus Christ abide all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. All sound learning is, therefore, a part of our Christian heritage. The new birth opens all human faculties and creates a thirst for knowledge.”



In these statements, we find the implications of Jesus’ command to love God with all of our minds. First, we submit our minds to Him as the ultimate source for wisdom and knowledge. A disciple, after all, is a “learning follower.” A Christian must be educated about Christ. And this is a task that continues eternally because we, as finite beings, will never come to the end of knowing an infinite God.

Second, we also find in these statements an acknowledgment that what can be known as true in our world is true because God has ordained it to be so. Therefore, all sound learning can be an act of worship to our Creator God. There have been seasons in church history where many Christians withdrew from aspects of education, fearing that new discoveries were somehow undoing the validity of our faith. And yet, here we are, 2,000 years later and the Church prevails as Jesus promised.

Finally, we must note that education and learning can only get us so far. It is unfortunate, but I have seen more than one student become so absorbed in a naturalistic worldview or philosophical position that they turn from Christ. If education alone could bring us to salvation, then the Great Commission would sound much different. But the commission we have is to proclaim Christ crucified, a foolish message, as Paul says. And we pray for a supernatural change to happen—namely, a new birth—that opens an individual’s faculties to savor the unworldly truth that man can never be good enough without a divine intervention.

Chase Abner is IBSA’s Collegiate Evangelism Strategist.

CONSIDER THIS For personal study or group discussion

- 1 *The BF&M* calls Christianity “the faith of enlightenment and intelligence.” But at times in our history, faith has been pitted against knowledge. How do faith and enlightenment work together?
- 2 Southern Baptists’ commitment to education applies to all venues: church, public schools, homeschooling, universities, and seminaries. In what ways does education outside of Christian settings contribute to our faith?
- 3 *The BF&M* also says education is “co-ordinate with the causes of missions and general benevolence” and should be supported along with those ministries. How does your church value education and provide support, when compared to missions or benevolence?
- 4 Take a personal inventory: About which subjects are you actively learning (for example: health, sports, politics, Bible, hobbies)? About which subjects do you need a refresher course?



See the World from a *new angle*

70% of Illinois' population lives in Chicagoland.

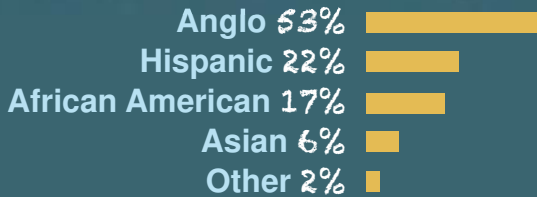
That's **9 million** people.



Chicago is on the forefront of re-urbanization in America:

- Reducing segregation in the city
- Fueling gentrification in neighborhoods
- Bringing large retailers into the city

High ethnic diversity



Religious Identity

31% claim to be Catholic
14% identify as Lutheran
11% no religious preference

— Percept Group

Through the Cooperative Program, Southern Baptists are planting churches to reach many languages and cultures in metro Chicago.

CP WORKS



WHAT MAKES US DIFFERENT

SBC SEMINARY EDUCATION

One dear lady said to me when I was a young youth minister, “You preach pretty good; we just need to get you some filling.” I felt compared to an apple turnover, without the apple. At the time, I was debating whether to move two states away to enroll in seminary. She convinced me.

“A call to preach is a call to prepare,” the president of my seminary said at new student orientation. He was trying to convince preacher-boys eager to get to the “field” not to skip the most important step in a lifetime of ministry. “Two or three years at seminary will make sure you always have something to say,” the president continued, “something worth hearing.”

Filling.

“Remember boys, a congregation will forgive you most anything, except boring them on Sunday morning.”

For a decade after its founding, the Southern Baptist Convention didn't have a seminary of its own. Many pastors were not well-educated. Southern Baptist churches were often led by local men, often farmers, who felt called to ministry, but brought little formal education to their work. In the second half of the 19th century, there was a rising distrust of higher theological education by people in the pews. Education was seen as antithetical to faith. The only “filling” a preacher needed would come from the Holy Spirit, many said.

But the founders of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville had a different view of education. Preachers needed to know what they believed. James Boyce was one of the first professors at Southern Seminary, and

its second president. “His theological conviction and his zeal for the strength and purity of Baptist churches drove him to an unrelenting advocacy of theological education for Baptist preachers,” wrote biographer Thomas Nettles.

Education at an SBC seminary is one thing that gives clarity to our theology and unity to our churches. Today there are six SBC seminaries:

- Southern in Louisville (founded in 1859)
- Southwestern in Fort Worth (1908)
- New Orleans (1916)
- Golden Gate in the San Francisco Bay area (1944), which will relocate to Southern California in 2016



- Southeastern in Wake Forest, NC (1950)
- Midwestern in Kansas City, MO (1957)

Seminaries once focused solely on preparing preachers for pastoral ministry. Today, they prepare ministers for a variety of callings: from missions to music, discipleship, and much more. But the biggest change in seminary education is its availability. SBC seminaries offer classes on their main campuses, but also at dozens of extension centers across the nation, online, and even in prisons.

Together SBC churches contribute 21.16% of their Cooperative Program offerings to education, so that seminary costs can be affordable for the 16,000 students preparing for ministry at our six SBC seminaries.

They're getting their “filling.”

— Eric Reed

Think about it:

1. How does affordable education affect a pastor's ability to minister?
2. Why is it important for Southern Baptists to have Southern Baptist seminaries?

ILLINOIS IN SIGHT

Developing leaders is key to church growth

“Everything rises and falls on leadership,” says pastor and leadership expert John Maxwell, “but knowing how to lead is only half the battle. Understanding leadership and actually leading are two different activities.”

As part of its commitment to leadership development, IBSA is creating a process to help church leaders assess their skill set and set new goals for personal growth. IBSA’s Charles Campbell, who works with church planters and young leaders, says, “Knowing yourself is the first piece: Do you understand who you are, how you are wired for ministry, and especially for leadership. How have people affirmed as you serve and as you begin to lead?”

This self-awareness requires honesty. “If you’re not willing to be honest with yourself, none of the assessments you take or conversations you have are going to help you. We have to be honest with ourselves and about ourselves,” Campbell said. “This process is not easy.”

The leadership development process involves four phases:

- leading yourself
- leading others in a small group or team
- leading a team of leaders
- leading an organization (the church).

In IBSA’s model, the process is likened to a river that starts small, then grows wider and deeper as



Charles Campbell meets with a group of young leaders at IBSA’s 2013 Youth Encounter student evangelism conference.

other tributaries join the flow. At any point, it’s possible to get caught in an eddy or beached on a sandbar.

That’s why leaders need good coaches.

Senior pastors are required to be organizational leaders, but sometimes they aren’t yet. This is where a good friend can make a difference. “I’ve had men who have disciplined me affirm me in some areas and critique others,” Campbell said. “Sometimes those weren’t pleasant conversations, but they were needed. We need to know about our blind spots.”

With Zone Consultants assigned to 10 groups of local associations, IBSA will be offering development of church leaders through a variety of conferences, coaching relationships, and peer cohorts. Pat Pajak, who headed church strengthening for IBSA, is leading the new Church Consulting Team.

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mission illinois

Pray for a new church

Location: Romeoville, Vernon Hills

Focus: Hispanic residents

Characteristics: There are 1.5 million people of Mexican heritage in this area, and more than 100,000 from Puerto Rico.

Pray: For more church planters to be raised up and sent out from Hispanic churches in Chicagoland.



– From the IBSA Church Planting Team

Clip and Share B-101 with

- Pastors
- Church staff
- Discipleship leaders
- Missions leaders
- New members

ABOUT B-101

This is a 20-part study on the basic beliefs and missions of our denomination. It is designed for new believers, new Baptists, and those who want a refresher. Clip it out of the newspaper, fold into a four-page leaflet, and share with the people who would benefit from the information. You might even lead a study.

B-101 can be used for:

- New members classes
- Study on missions in Illinois and around the world
- Exploration of doctrines in *The Baptist Faith & Message*

Make as many photocopies as you need for study groups, church members, and worship attenders. Or download the PDFs at www.IBSA.org/B101.

Produced by the editors of the *Illinois Baptist*. Eric Reed, Meredith Flynn, Lisa Sergent. Designed by Kris Kell.

Look for B-101 in every issue!

What are you doing on Wednesday nights?

This is the 14th in our 20-part series. That means more than half the essays on *The Baptist Faith & Message* are ready for use in a new members class, small group, or doctrine study. Look online and download the set. We’ve bundled them for easy printing and distribution.

By the way: If you need copies of *The BF&M (2000)*, they can be downloaded too, or IBSA will provide them for your new study group.

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