

SVLC Ministry Context Summary

Purpose

We must understand the people/communities in our region and ourselves to effectively minister to them. Our region is the Birmingham-Hoover Metropolitan Statistical Area (BHMSA), 7 counties centered on Birmingham: Jefferson, Bibb, Blount, Chilton, St Clair, Shelby and Walker with a total population (2016) of 1,147,417 people. This is a summary of Demographic, Economic & Financial, Religious and Cultural aspects of this area to identify local needs and the resources SVLC can offer.

Demographics

The median age in the BHMSA is 38.8 years and the population is 48% male and 52% female. Major ethnic groups are White at 63.8%, Black at 28.2% and Hispanic at 4.3%. Households are 59.2% Married Couples, 19.5% Female no spouse, 15.6% Nonfamily and 5.7% Male no spouse. English is the language spoken at home for over 90% of the people with Spanish next at about 5%.

SVLC's official active membership is 243 people. Members live in over 30 Alabama zip codes, but 79% of them live in 12 zip codes ranging from Homewood south to Chelsea and Montevallo. 8% of the members reside in the same zip code as SVLC. The median age for SVLC members is 48 years, 17% are under 18, 25% are over 65, 47% are male and 53% female. SVLC data is not complete enough to give accurate statistics in other categories.

Economic & Financial

BHMSA per capita income (2016) is \$29,265 and median household income (2016) is \$52,226. 13.9% of the persons are below the poverty threshold. For children under 18, the rate is 20% and for seniors, 65 and older, the rate is 9%. Median value of owner-occupied units is \$154,000 and 13.9% of the population has moved since the previous year with 2.9% coming from a different state or country. The education level of 87.7% of the people is High School Graduate or higher and 29.9% have a Bachelor's degree or higher. The largest employer is the University of Alabama at Birmingham and the five largest areas of payroll jobs are Wholesale & Retail Trade, Government, Education & Health Services, Professional & Business Services and Leisure & Hospitality.

SVLC facilities could house a larger congregation. A member's gift enabled critical maintenance over the past year, including repainting, trim & gutter repairs and power washing. Facility operating costs have been stable from 2014-2017, but facilities still need additional maintenance and updating. SVLC has no long-term debt; but declining income is a significant concern; Offerings decreased 15% (\$63,429) between 2014 and 2017 although the number of giving units (individuals or families with envelopes) is about the same. Loss of key members in recent years through death and transfer is a major challenge. Expenses have been lower than budgeted, but a primary reason for lower expenses is that SVLC is not fully staffed; the Director of Youth and Family Ministry and Chef positions are vacant.

Religious

There are 2071 congregations with 800,800 members in the BHMSA (2010). 327,247 people either claim no denomination or are not surveyed. There are 4 ELCA Churches in the BHMSA with 895 members (2010), SVLC in Homewood, SOTH in Inverness, Faith in Clay and Grace in Bessemer. Other area Denominations have numerous ministries such as campus ministries and outreach to ethnic, LGBTQ, addiction/recovery, homeless, hungry, poor and senior groups.

The number of "unchurched" but still religious people in the US has increased from about 2 in 10 in the early 1990's to over 4 in 10 today and is estimated at more than 150 million people. Many identify as Christian, but

distance themselves from being Protestant or Catholic, often avoiding church because of negative past experiences.

The BHMSA has 13 megachurches, protestant congregations with a sustained weekly attendance of 2000 persons or more. They often have dramatic, rapid growth. Their members cite clear mission & purpose, a wide array of programs and inspirational worship services as attractions. They face challenges sustaining worship attendance, attracting young adults and maintaining spiritual vitality.

SVLC has supported a diverse set of ministries throughout its history and currently supports causes such as Aid to Inmate Mothers, Angel Tree and Lutheran World Relief. SVLC has benefited from partnership activities with other ELCA churches for Youth activities and disaster response. Membership and worship attendance has declined around 20% in the past decade.

Cultural

This list provides an overview of issues and needs in the Birmingham Metro area and is intended to stimulate thought and discussion. It is not a list of issues that Shades Valley Lutheran should minister to. It is a snapshot of the societal environment of our location and times.

Racism - Racism remains an issue in the BHMSA with court actions over school systems and many segregated neighborhoods. While national polls show that most US adults believe there is much ethnic/racial hostility in the US, they also believe that Christian churches play an important part in reconciliation.

Immigration - With a fast growing Hispanic population, more than 70 foreign-based companies operating in the BHMSA and UAB recruiting staff and students worldwide, immigration is an important issue.

LGBTQ - Same-sex marriage was declared legal in Alabama in January 2015 with national legalization in June 2015. The LGBTQ community actively promotes policy protection and cultural acceptance locally and statewide. While there are no state laws giving protection to groups based on sexual orientation and gender identity, Birmingham passed a comprehensive anti-discrimination ordinance in 2017 and is dealing with calls for its repeal based on concerns that it infringes upon religious freedom.

Hunger & Homelessness - Access to healthy and affordable food is a concern, both in urban and rural areas. On any given night in central Alabama, an estimated 1092 people are homeless, including families with children, veterans, and people with mental illness or substance abuse problems.

Human Trafficking - Birmingham is a hub in the Southeast for human trafficking, a \$150 billion industry. Trafficking is happening in communities throughout the BHMSA.

Spirituality - People identifying as Christian or spiritual are pursuing personal health and growth through “self care.” The most popular practices, overall, are spending time in nature for reflection, reading books on spiritual topics and meditation.

Fighting Poverty - Conservatives and Liberals hold different beliefs on poverty, but signs point to common ground among those with a practicing faith. Both tend to be concerned about local poverty. Practicing faith has a strong positive influence on people’s engagement with the poor, regardless of political ideology. Both groups agree that it’s not primarily an individual’s job to fight global poverty; the issue is too vast. There may be an opportunity for the church to take the lead in this effort.

This is just a general summary of issues that affect how we serve our community. There is more detail available on these topics. Please contact the church office if you want additional information.