

Demographic and Religious Landscape Analysis for Ministry Strategy: Chattahoochee Hills and Palmetto, Georgia

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I. Introduction

A. Purpose and Scope

This report provides a detailed socio-demographic and religious analysis of the municipalities of Chattahoochee Hills and Palmetto, Georgia. Its primary objective is to equip church leadership teams with actionable data and context to inform strategic decisions regarding current ministries, future outreach initiatives, and potential church planting efforts, particularly concerning the growing religiously unaffiliated population. The analysis examines population dynamics and key demographic characteristics, comparing recent data (primarily from the 2019-2023 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates) with trends observed over the past decade (approximately 2015-2025). Furthermore, it incorporates population projections extending to 2035 where available. The geographic focus is on the specific municipalities of Chattahoochee Hills and Palmetto. However, due to data limitations at the municipal level, particularly for religious affiliation and detailed historical trends, county-level data (Fulton, Clayton, and Coweta counties) and regional/state benchmarks are utilized as essential context and proxies. The report culminates in strategic summaries tailored for church leadership for each municipality.

B. Methodology and Data Sources

The methodology involves synthesizing quantitative data from reputable sources to construct a holistic community profile relevant to church ministry planning. Key data sources include:

- **U.S. Census Bureau:** American Community Survey (ACS) 5-Year Estimates (accessed via data.census.gov, Census Reporter, Data USA), QuickFacts.¹
- **Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC):** Primarily Series 17 Population Forecasts and related estimates.¹⁹
- **The Association of Religion Data Archives (thearda.com):** U.S. Religion Census data (congregations and adherents by county), national/state religious profiles.
- **Pew Research Center:** Religious Landscape Study (national, regional, and state-level religious affiliation, beliefs, and practices).²⁴
- **Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI):** American Values Atlas (state-level

religious affiliation, "nones," Christian Nationalism data).³⁷

- **Niche.com:** Local public and private school ratings and reviews.⁵⁰

Several limitations must be acknowledged. Detailed, reliable religious affiliation and belief data are generally unavailable at the municipal level; therefore, county, state, and regional data serve as proxies. Similarly, specific demographic data points for the baseline year (c. 2015) are often unavailable at the municipal level, requiring reliance on estimates from various sources or comparisons with the earliest available comprehensive ACS data. Population projections are typically generated at the county or regional level, not for individual municipalities within those counties. This report relies heavily on ACS 5-year estimates, which represent averages over a 60-month period, providing increased statistical reliability for smaller geographies but less temporal precision than 1-year estimates.⁵ Caution is advised when comparing ACS datasets across different time periods, particularly around the 2020 estimates, which were impacted by data collection disruptions during the COVID-19 pandemic.⁶⁵

C. Report Structure

This report proceeds with detailed community profiles for Chattahoochee Hills and Palmetto, analyzing population dynamics, key demographic characteristics, the religious landscape, and the educational environment for each. Following these profiles, a section examines the broader regional religious context, with a particular focus on the religiously unaffiliated population. The report concludes with a synthesis of findings and overarching strategic considerations relevant to church leadership.

II. Community Profile: Chattahoochee Hills, GA

Chattahoochee Hills, incorporated in 2007 and located in southwestern Fulton County with portions extending into Coweta County, presents a unique demographic profile characterized by its commitment to preserving rural character amidst the pressures of the growing Atlanta metropolitan area.⁶⁸

A. Population Dynamics

- **Current Size & Recent Trends (c. 2015-2023):** The most recent ACS 5-Year Estimates (2019-2023) place the population of Chattahoochee Hills at 3,537.¹² Other sources provide slightly different recent estimates, such as 3,361 from georgia-demographics.com citing 2023 estimates.¹⁴ Establishing a precise baseline around 2015 is challenging, but available data points suggest a population between 2,700 and 3,000 during that period. Sources indicate estimates of 2,871⁷¹, 2,754⁷², approximately 3,000⁷³, and 2,699⁷⁴ around 2015. An

annexation in 2015 also increased the city's population.⁷⁵ Using a working estimate of approximately 2,800 for 2015, the city has experienced considerable growth over the past decade, increasing by roughly 26% to its current level of ~3,500. This indicates steady, possibly accelerating growth, with one source citing a recent annual growth rate of 3.72% and a 21.8% increase since the 2020 Census.⁷⁶ This municipal growth contrasts sharply with data for Chattahoochee County (a separate entity located further south), which shows population decline⁷⁷, underscoring the importance of using city-specific data where possible.

- **Future Projections (2030, 2035):** Official municipal-level population projections from the Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC) are not available.¹⁹ ARC's Series 17 forecasts focus on county and regional levels. Fulton County, where most of Chattahoochee Hills resides, is projected to experience significant growth, adding over 254,000 residents between 2020 and 2050, reaching a population of 1,321,079.¹⁹ The broader 21-county Atlanta region is projected to reach 6.8 million by 2030 and 7.4 million by 2040.²⁰ While specific 2030 and 2035 figures for Fulton County are not directly available in the provided snippets¹⁹, the overall trend is strong growth. However, Chattahoochee Hills' specific trajectory may differ from the county average due to its unique land use policies emphasizing preservation (aiming to keep 70% undeveloped) and its location on the urban fringe.⁶⁹ Despite these policies, its proximity to Atlanta suggests continued growth pressure is likely.

B. Key Demographic Characteristics (c. 2015 vs. Latest ACS)

The following table summarizes key demographic shifts based on available data, primarily comparing the 2019-2023 ACS 5-Year Estimates with baseline information where available around 2015.

Metric	~2015 Value / Source	2023 ACS 5-Year Value / Source	Change / Notes
Total Population	~2,800 ⁷¹	3,537 ¹²	Approx. +26% growth
Median Age	Likely high (21% 62+ in 2015 ⁷⁴)	41.6 years ¹²	Remains significantly higher than region/state (~37 yrs); indicates an aging

			population.
Avg. Household Size	N/A	2.8 persons ¹³	Slightly higher than region/state (2.6-2.7); suggests family orientation.
Median Household Income	N/A	\$76,552 ¹²	Below Metro (\$86k) but above State (\$74k); indicates relative affluence.
Poverty Rate (%)	N/A	5.5% ¹²	Very low compared to region (11%) and state (13.5%).
% White (Non-Hispanic)	Likely higher	55.7% ¹²	Majority group, but declining share reflecting regional diversification.
% Black (Non-Hispanic)	Likely lower	28.7% ¹²	Significant minority population.
% Hispanic (of any race)	Likely lower	11.8% ¹²	Notable and likely growing minority population.
% Bachelor's Degree or Higher	N/A	49.4% ¹³	Exceptionally high compared to region (41.5%) and state (34.2%).
% Owner-Occupied Housing	N/A	90.0% ¹²	Extremely high; indicates a stable, invested residential base. Median home value \$338k. ¹³

- **Age Distribution:** The community's median age of 41.6 years¹² is notably higher than the Atlanta-Sandy Springs-Roswell Metro Area (~37 years) and Georgia

(~37.4 years).¹³ Analysis of age brackets from the 2023 ACS data reveals substantial populations in the 50-59 year range (20%) and the 65+ range (combined 31%).¹³ This pattern is consistent with earlier data suggesting a relatively older population base even around 2015.⁷⁴ This demographic structure points towards an established community, potentially with many long-term residents and retirees, rather than one dominated by recent graduates or young professionals. Consequently, ministry focus may need to include robust senior adult programs, potentially addressing needs like healthcare access, social connection for retirees, and legacy planning. Outreach efforts aimed at younger families might require more targeted approaches to connect with the smaller, though still present, younger cohorts (7% aged 20-29, 11% aged 30-39).¹³

- **Household Composition:** The average household size of 2.8 persons¹³ is slightly larger than regional and state averages (2.6-2.7), and marital status data indicates a high proportion of married adults (roughly half, based on 60% male/53% female married rates).¹³ While specific data on the percentage of family households versus non-family households is not available from the snippets¹², the combination of larger household size and high marriage rates strongly suggests a community predominantly composed of families. Although the median age is high, the 0-19 age cohort represents approximately 30% of the population¹³, indicating the presence of children and adolescents, likely belonging to established families who may have moved to the area earlier in their life cycle. This structure implies that family ministry, youth groups, and potentially marriage enrichment programs are relevant areas for church focus. The slightly larger household size might also hint at some multi-generational living arrangements, requiring sensitivity in ministry approaches.
- **Income and Poverty:** Chattahoochee Hills exhibits relative affluence. The 2023 ACS Median Household Income of \$76,552¹² sits slightly below the Atlanta metro median (\$86k) but comfortably above the Georgia median (\$74k).¹³ More striking is the very low poverty rate of 5.5%¹², less than half the rate observed in the broader region (11%) and state (13.5%).¹³ The income distribution further supports this, with over 40% of households earning above \$100,000 annually (24% between \$100k-\$200k, 17% over \$200k).¹³ This paints a picture of economic stability for the majority of residents. While direct poverty alleviation might be less of a primary community need compared to other areas, churches can focus on ministries related to financial stewardship, responsible wealth management, and generosity. Outreach may be more effective focusing on community building, spiritual exploration, or addressing non-material forms of poverty (e.g., relational,

spiritual) rather than primarily material aid.

- **Racial/Ethnic Diversity:** The 2023 ACS data shows Chattahoochee Hills is predominantly White (Non-Hispanic) at 55.7%, but with substantial minority populations, including Black or African American (Non-Hispanic) at 28.7% and Hispanic or Latino (of any race) at 11.8%.¹² This composition makes it less diverse than Fulton County overall (which is approximately 36% White, 42% Black, 8% Asian, 8% Hispanic⁸⁰), but indicates participation in the broader diversification trend occurring across the Atlanta region.¹⁹ Growth in the region is projected to be driven almost entirely by populations of color.¹⁹ Churches in Chattahoochee Hills operate within an increasingly diverse context. Ministry efforts require cultural competence and intentionality to be welcoming and relevant to Black and Hispanic residents. Opportunities exist for multi-ethnic worship experiences, small groups, or community partnerships that bridge cultural lines.
- **Educational Attainment:** The residents of Chattahoochee Hills possess exceptionally high levels of education. Nearly half (49.4%) hold a Bachelor's degree or higher, and a remarkable 25% possess post-graduate degrees.¹³ These figures significantly surpass the rates for the Atlanta metro area (41.5%) and the state of Georgia (34.2%).¹³ This high concentration of advanced education suggests a population likely engaged in professional, managerial, or technical occupations. Ministry approaches can therefore anticipate a high level of literacy and potentially engage with complex theological, ethical, or social issues. Small groups centered on intellectual discussion, faith and work integration, or professional ethics might find resonance. Outreach could involve forging connections through educational institutions or professional associations relevant to the community.
- **Housing Tenure:** The community is characterized by a remarkably high homeownership rate, with approximately 90% of housing units being owner-occupied according to 2023 ACS data.¹² The median home value is correspondingly high at \$338,800¹³, reflecting the desirability of the area and aligning closely with the broader Atlanta metro market while exceeding the state average. This prevalence of homeownership points towards a stable, invested residential population with strong ties to the community, rather than a highly transient one. For church strategy, this implies that growth is more likely to stem from attracting and integrating existing residents rather than relying on high population turnover. Ministry can effectively focus on building long-term relationships and fostering deep community integration. Outreach efforts targeting homeowners through neighborhood-based activities or community

events could prove fruitful.

C. Religious Landscape

Reliable religious affiliation and belief data are not collected at the municipal level by major surveys. Therefore, this analysis relies on Fulton County data from the 2020 U.S. Religion Census⁸² as the primary proxy, supplemented by state and regional findings from Pew Research Center²⁶ and PRRI.⁴⁷

- **Adherence Rate (Fulton County Proxy):** The 2020 U.S. Religion Census reported 716,915 adherents across various religious bodies out of a total Fulton County population of 1,066,710.⁸² This yields a calculated adherence rate of approximately 67.2%. It is crucial to note that the definition of "adherent" varies by reporting religious body, often including members, children, and regular participants, making direct comparison to survey-based affiliation rates complex.⁸³ This rate is notably higher than neighboring Clayton County's 45.7%.
- **Major Religious Traditions (Fulton County Proxy):** Fulton County exhibits significant religious diversity.⁸² The Catholic Church reports the largest number of adherents (174,520). Mainline Protestant denominations are well-represented, particularly the United Methodist Church (98,864), Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) (21,901), and the Episcopal Church (17,664). Black Protestant traditions have a strong presence, including the National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc. (69,932), National Missionary Baptist Convention of America (24,928), Progressive National Baptist Convention, Inc. (16,929), African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME) (10,040), and Church of God in Christ (COGIC) (6,008). Evangelical Protestantism is also prominent, with large numbers associated with the Southern Baptist Convention (63,257), Non-denominational Christian Churches (54,470), Church of God (Cleveland, TN) (17,706), Seventh-day Adventist Church (13,477), and Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) (10,055). Additionally, Fulton County hosts substantial communities of other faiths, including Muslims (est. 29,878), Jehovah's Witnesses (15,646), Jewish adherents (across Reform, Conservative, and Orthodox branches, totaling approx. 20,835), members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (6,110), Buddhists (approx. 4,983 total), Baha'is (1,186), and Hindus (at least 336 reported by traditional temples, likely higher considering other groups).⁸²
- **The Religiously Unaffiliated ("Nones"):** While county adherence data suggests high affiliation, survey data provides a clearer picture of the unaffiliated population. Statewide in Georgia, 26% of adults identify as religiously unaffiliated ("nones"), encompassing atheists (3%), agnostics (3%), and those identifying as

"nothing in particular" (20%).²⁸ The Atlanta Metro area shows a similar rate at 25%.³⁰ Nationally, the unaffiliated stand at 29%, a figure that grew rapidly from 16% in 2007 but has shown signs of plateauing since 2020.²⁶ Given Chattahoochee Hills' specific demographics (older median age, higher White population share compared to Fulton County overall), its unaffiliated rate might be slightly lower than the state or metro average, potentially falling in the 20-25% range. However, mirroring national trends, this segment, particularly among younger residents not captured by the high median age, is almost certainly present and growing. The existence of this substantial and likely expanding group, disconnected from traditional religious institutions, presents a primary strategic challenge and opportunity for churches in the area. Effective engagement will necessitate moving beyond conventional church models and exploring avenues like community service, non-traditional gatherings, or digital outreach that resonate with those who may be spiritual but institutionally skeptical.²⁷

- **Religious Beliefs and Practices (State/Regional Proxy):** While specific data for Chattahoochee Hills is unavailable, state and regional trends offer context. In Georgia, Christian identification has declined but stabilized recently (67% in 2024, down from 79% in 2014).²⁶ A high percentage of Georgians likely still consider religion important in their lives.²⁵ However, aligning with national trends, active religious practice appears lower than affiliation or stated belief. Nationally, only 44% report praying daily (down from 58% in 2007)³³, and only about a third attend religious services monthly.²⁶ While belief in God or a universal spirit remains high nationally (83%)²⁹, a gap exists between belief and active participation. Furthermore, the presence of Christian Nationalism is notable in Georgia, with 38% of residents qualifying as Adherents (15%) or Sympathizers (23%) according to 2024 PRRI data.⁴⁷ This ideology, linking Christian identity strongly with American identity, correlates with certain demographics (older age, lower education, Republican affiliation, White Evangelical or Hispanic Protestant identity, frequent church attendance) and specific social/political views.³⁹ The relatively high adherence rate calculated for Fulton County likely captures many nominal affiliations rather than reflecting high levels of active weekly engagement. This disconnect underscores that ministry cannot assume affiliation equates to active participation. Strategies are needed to engage nominal Christians and those who may be de-churching. Awareness of Christian Nationalist perspectives within the congregation and broader community is also important for fostering unity and effective outreach.

D. Educational Environment

Families in Chattahoochee Hills interact with multiple school systems due to its location spanning Fulton and Coweta county lines and the presence of charter schools.

- **School Zoning:** The majority of Chattahoochee Hills falls within the Fulton County Schools district.⁸⁴ However, proximity to the Coweta County line means some residents, particularly in annexed areas⁷⁰, may be zoned for or choose Coweta County Schools.⁷⁰ Charter schools like Amana Academy (Fulton) and Odyssey Charter (Coweta) also serve the area.⁵¹ Chattahoochee Hills Charter School (K-8) operates within the city limits under the Fulton County system.⁵¹ Precise zoning requires using the official Fulton County Schools "Find My School" locator tool with a specific address.⁸⁵
- **School Ratings Summary (Niche Grades):** The quality of public schools accessible to Chattahoochee Hills residents varies significantly by grade level.⁵⁰

School Type	School Name	District/Type	Grades Served	Niche Grade	Notes
Elementary	Brooks Elementary School	Coweta County	PK, K-5	A	#131 in GA; Serves area near county line
Elementary/ Middle	Amana Academy Charter School	Fulton Charter	K-8	A	#142 Elem in GA; Expeditionary Learning
Elementary	Wolf Creek Elementary School	Fulton County	PK, K-5	B+	#440 in GA
Elementary	Palmetto Elementary School	Fulton County	PK, K-5	B	#517 in GA
Elementary/ Middle	Odyssey Charter School	Coweta Charter	K-8	B	#533 Elem in GA

Elementary/ Middle	The Main Street Academy	Fulton Charter	K-8	B	#665 Elem in GA; STEAM focus
Elementary/ Middle	Chattahooch ee Hills Charter School	Fulton Charter	K-8	B-	Located in city; Mixed reviews ⁵⁷
Elementary	E.C. West Elementary School	Fulton County	PK, K-5	B-	STEM school
Middle	KIPP South Fulton Academy School	Fulton Charter	5-8	B-	
Middle	Bear Creek Middle School	Fulton County	6-8	C+	Likely zoned middle for parts of Chatt Hills
High	Independenc e High School	Fulton County	9-12	C+	Alternative/s maller setting
High	Hapeville Charter Career Academy	Fulton Charter	9-12	C	Career focus
High	Creekside High School	Fulton County	9-12	C	Likely zoned high for parts of Chatt Hills
High	Skyview High School	Fulton County	9-12	D-	

Note: School zoning requires address verification. Grades based on Niche.com data.⁵⁰
 Critiques exist regarding the methodology of school rating sites.⁸⁸

- **Educational Landscape:** The availability of highly-rated elementary options

(Brooks, Amana) aligns with the community's high value placed on education, as evidenced by its high adult educational attainment. However, the generally lower ratings for the likely zoned public middle and high schools (Bear Creek, Creekside) present a potential challenge for families as children age.

Chattahoochee Hills Charter provides a K-8 option within the city, but its B- grade and mixed reviews suggest it may not meet all families' expectations.⁵⁷ This discrepancy between strong elementary options and weaker secondary ones could influence residential decisions, potentially leading families to seek private schools⁵² or move as children reach middle/high school age. This dynamic presents potential ministry opportunities related to supporting families navigating school choices, offering supplemental educational programs like tutoring or after-school activities, or partnering with local schools. Understanding school feeder patterns and the choices families make is crucial for effective youth and family ministry planning.

E. Strategic Implications Summary for Chattahoochee Hills

- **Outreach:** Strategies should focus on building deep, long-term relationships within this stable, family-centric, and relatively affluent community. Given the high education levels, engagement around intellectual aspects of faith or faith-and-work integration may be effective. Intentional, culturally sensitive outreach is needed for the growing Black and Hispanic populations. A significant priority is developing non-traditional approaches to connect with the estimated 20-25% of residents who are religiously unaffiliated, recognizing their potential spiritual openness despite institutional skepticism.
- **Ministry Focus:** Core ministries should likely include robust family and youth programs, alongside dedicated ministries for the significant senior adult population. Given the economic profile, emphasis on financial stewardship and generosity may be more pertinent than direct poverty relief, although awareness of potential hidden needs remains important. Addressing the observed gap between religious affiliation/belief and active practice requires strategies that nurture discipleship beyond Sunday attendance. Awareness and navigation of Christian Nationalist viewpoints within the community are necessary for unity.
- **Church Planting/Congregations:** The city's emphasis on rural preservation might make large new church construction challenging. Alternative models like house churches, smaller community gatherings, or utilizing existing community spaces (like Serenbe's facilities) could be more viable. Success likely hinges on integrating into the existing community fabric. Reaching the unaffiliated demands

innovation beyond traditional service formats, potentially through community service partnerships, discussion groups, or online platforms. Partnering with or supporting families around educational choices, given the mixed public school ratings, could be a valuable service.

III. Community Profile: Palmetto, GA

Palmetto, situated primarily in Fulton County but extending into Coweta County, presents a demographic and socio-economic profile distinct from its neighbor, Chattahoochee Hills. It embodies a more traditional small-town feel within the dynamic South Fulton/North Coweta corridor.

A. Population Dynamics

- **Current Size & Recent Trends (c. 2015-2023):** Recent population estimates for Palmetto converge around 5,000 residents. The 2023 population estimate from the Census Bureau is 5,021¹⁵, aligning with projections from georgia-demographics.com.¹⁸ Data USA, using 2023 ACS data, reports a slightly lower figure of 4,681¹⁶, as does Census Reporter.¹⁷ For planning purposes, ~5,000 serves as a reliable current estimate. Establishing a 2015 baseline points to a population around 4,500-4,600. Sources cite 4,625 for 2015⁸⁹, 4,489 based on 2014 data⁹⁰, approximately 4,602⁸⁹, and 4,770 for 2013.⁹¹ Using ~4,500 as the 2015 estimate, Palmetto has experienced modest growth over the past decade, around 11%. Notably, some recent estimates suggest a slight decline or stagnation since the 2020 census count of 5,071.¹⁵ This slower, potentially stagnating trend contrasts with the more robust growth observed in Chattahoochee Hills.
- **Future Projections (2030, 2035):** As with Chattahoochee Hills, specific municipal-level population projections for Palmetto are not provided in the ARC Series 17 forecast data.¹⁹ Palmetto's location across both Fulton and Clayton counties means its future is tied to the trajectories of both. ARC projects continued, albeit slower, growth for these core counties through 2050 (Fulton +24%, Clayton +17% from 2020).²⁰ The overall Atlanta region is expected to grow significantly, reaching 6.8 million by 2030 and 7.4 million by 2040.²⁰ However, Palmetto's recent lack of growth suggests its future trajectory might lag behind the county averages. Factors such as land availability, housing stock development, and local economic opportunities will likely shape its specific path. Growth is probable, given regional trends, but likely to be moderate rather than rapid.

B. Key Demographic Characteristics (c. 2015 vs. Latest ACS)

The following table outlines key demographic characteristics for Palmetto, comparing the latest ACS data (2019-2023) with baseline information where available.

Metric	~2015 Value / Source	2023 ACS 5-Year Value / Source	Change / Notes
Total Population	~4,500 ⁸⁹	~5,000 ¹⁵	Approx. +11% growth over decade; recent stagnation/slight decline noted.
Median Age	N/A	42.8 years ¹⁶	Very high compared to region/state (~37 yrs) and Chattahoochee Hills (41.6); significant older population (16.9% 65+ ¹⁵).
Avg. Household Size	N/A	2.42 persons ¹⁵	Lower than region/state (2.6-2.7) and Chattahoochee Hills (2.8); suggests more singles/smaller families.
Median Household Income	Likely lower	\$54,745 ¹⁵	Significantly lower than Chattahoochee Hills (\$76k), Metro (\$86k), and State (\$74k).
Poverty Rate (%)	N/A	11.0% ¹⁵	Near Metro average (11%), below State (13.5%). Family poverty lower (5.9% ¹⁸).
% Black (Non-Hispanic)	Likely majority	51-52% ¹⁵	Majority racial group.

% White (Non-Hispanic)	Likely higher	~23% ¹⁵	Significant minority group.
% Hispanic (of any race)	Likely lower	~20% ¹⁵	Large and likely growing minority population.
% Bachelor's Degree or Higher	Likely lower	13.2% ¹⁵	Significantly lower than Chattahoochee Hills (49.4%), region (41.5%), and state (34.2%).
% Owner-Occupied Housing	N/A	48.4% ¹⁵	Near even split with renters; much lower than Chattahoochee Hills (90%). Median home value \$203k. ¹⁵

- **Age Distribution:** Palmetto exhibits a strikingly high median age of 42.8 years¹⁶, surpassing even Chattahoochee Hills (41.6) and significantly exceeding regional and state averages (~37 years). The proportion of residents aged 65 and over is substantial at 16.9%¹⁵, while the share under 18 is relatively smaller at 20.8%.¹⁵ The age structure features large cohorts in the 50-59 (20%) and 60+ (23%) brackets.¹⁷ This demographic profile strongly indicates an aging community, potentially with fewer young families compared to the regional norm. Consequently, ministry to senior adults emerges as a critical area of need, encompassing potential programs related to healthcare navigation, social engagement, and spiritual care for aging populations. Outreach efforts aimed at families with young children may face greater challenges due to the smaller youth cohort and require highly specific targeting.
- **Household Composition:** The average household size in Palmetto is 2.42 persons¹⁵, which is smaller than in Chattahoochee Hills (2.8) and below regional/state averages. While data on the specific percentage of family households is limited¹⁵, the smaller household size, combined with marital status data suggesting lower marriage rates than in Chattahoochee Hills¹⁷, points towards a greater prevalence of single-person households (including seniors living alone), single-parent families, or other non-family living arrangements. This

contrasts with the more traditional family structure observed in Chattahoochee Hills. Churches serving Palmetto must be equipped to minister effectively to this diverse range of household structures. This includes potentially developing or strengthening singles ministries, support groups for single parents, and programs tailored to the needs of divorced or widowed individuals. Family ministry initiatives should strive for inclusivity, recognizing and supporting non-traditional family units.

- **Income and Poverty:** Palmetto presents a more working-class economic profile compared to its neighbor and the region. The Median Household Income is \$54,745 ¹⁵, significantly lower than in Chattahoochee Hills (\$76k), the Atlanta metro area (\$86k), and the state of Georgia (\$74k). The overall poverty rate, at 11.0% ¹⁵, aligns with the metro Atlanta average but is below the state average (13.5%). Interestingly, the poverty rate specifically for families is lower, at 5.9% ¹⁸, suggesting that poverty might be more concentrated among individuals living alone or in non-family households. This economic context indicates that ministries addressing financial hardship, offering job search assistance, providing practical needs support, and promoting financial literacy could be particularly impactful in Palmetto. Outreach efforts should remain sensitive to the economic realities faced by many residents.
- **Racial/Ethnic Diversity:** Palmetto is a majority-minority community, standing in stark contrast to Chattahoochee Hills. The largest group is Black or African American (Non-Hispanic), constituting approximately 51-52% of the population.¹⁵ White (Non-Hispanic) residents form a significant minority at around 23%.¹⁵ Notably, there is a large and likely growing Hispanic or Latino population, representing nearly 20% of residents.¹⁵ This diverse composition reflects the broader demographic shifts in South Fulton and North Clayton counties. For church leadership, this necessitates intentional cross-cultural outreach and ministry. Congregations and leadership should strive to reflect the community's diversity. Specific outreach to Black and Hispanic residents is paramount, potentially including Spanish-language services or resources. A nuanced understanding of the cultural contexts and historical background related to race and ethnicity in the area is vital for building trust and effective ministry.
- **Educational Attainment:** Educational attainment levels in Palmetto are considerably lower than in Chattahoochee Hills and the surrounding region. Only 13.2% of adults aged 25 and older hold a Bachelor's degree or higher.¹⁵ While the high school graduation rate is relatively high at 90.1% ¹⁵, the largest segments of the adult population have attained either a high school diploma (46%) or some

college education (31%) as their highest level.¹⁷ This suggests that ministry communication should prioritize clarity and accessibility, potentially avoiding overly academic language. Practical, skills-based programs, such as GED preparation, job skills training, or English language classes, could meet tangible community needs and serve as valuable outreach initiatives. Educational support and mentoring programs for youth could also be highly beneficial.

- **Housing Tenure:** Palmetto shows a near-even split between homeowners and renters, with an owner-occupancy rate of 48.4%.¹⁵ This is significantly lower than the 90% rate in Chattahoochee Hills. Correspondingly, housing is more affordable, with a median owner-occupied home value of \$203,600¹⁵, substantially lower than in Chattahoochee Hills (\$338k) and the broader region/state. The higher proportion of renters suggests potentially greater residential mobility compared to its neighboring city. This dynamic requires outreach strategies that can effectively connect with renters, who may have shorter residency durations. Ministries might also consider addressing issues related to housing stability or affordability. The more accessible housing costs may attract different demographic groups than Chattahoochee Hills, such as younger families starting out, individuals with lower incomes, or recent immigrants.

C. Religious Landscape

As municipal-level religious data is scarce, this analysis uses data from Fulton County⁸² and Clayton County, where Palmetto is situated, along with state/regional survey data.

- **Adherence Rate (County Proxies):** Fulton County's calculated adherence rate from the 2020 Religion Census is high (~67.2%), while Clayton County's is significantly lower (45.7%). Given Palmetto spans both counties and its demographic profile aligns more closely with parts of Clayton County, its overall religious adherence rate is likely lower than Fulton County's average and potentially lower than the state average, suggesting a larger proportion of unaffiliated residents compared to Chattahoochee Hills.
- **Major Religious Traditions (County Proxies & Local Demographics):** Clayton County's religious landscape is heavily influenced by Evangelical Protestant groups (Non-denominational and Southern Baptist are the largest) and Black Protestant denominations (National Baptist USA, National Missionary Baptist, AME, COGIC). Catholic presence is notable but smaller than in Fulton. Clayton also has surprisingly large Hindu and Muslim populations reported in the 2020

census. Fulton County shows greater diversity across Catholic, Mainline, Black Protestant, Evangelical, Muslim, and Jewish groups.⁸² Considering Palmetto's majority Black population and large Hispanic minority, the religious landscape likely features a strong Black Protestant presence (various Baptist, Methodist, Pentecostal traditions) and a significant, likely growing, Catholic population influenced by Hispanic residents. Evangelical Protestantism (including Southern Baptist and Non-denominational churches) is also expected to be prominent. Mainline Protestant representation is likely lower than in North Fulton areas.

- **The Religiously Unaffiliated ("Nones"):** State (26%) and Atlanta Metro (25%) data indicate a substantial unaffiliated population.²⁸ Clayton County's lower adherence rate (45.7%) suggests a potentially higher proportion of "nones" in that part of Palmetto's geography compared to the Fulton side. Considering these factors alongside national trends showing growth among the unaffiliated across demographics³¹, Palmetto's unaffiliated rate is likely higher than Chattahoochee Hills' and may exceed the state/metro average, potentially falling in the 25-35% range. Engaging this significant and diverse group represents a key strategic imperative for local churches, requiring culturally attuned and non-traditional outreach methods that address potential skepticism towards religious institutions.
- **Religious Beliefs and Practices (State/Regional Proxy & Local Context):** While general trends of high belief in God alongside declining active participation likely hold true²⁶, Palmetto's specific demographics suggest variations. Black Protestants, the majority group, typically report high levels of religious importance and attendance compared to other groups. This points to a potentially vibrant core of active churchgoers within certain segments of the community. Simultaneously, the likely higher unaffiliated rate suggests a large segment disconnected from institutional religion. The presence of Christian Nationalism (38% in Georgia⁴⁷) may manifest differently across Palmetto's diverse racial and ethnic groups compared to predominantly White communities, given its correlation with White Evangelicals and Hispanic Protestants nationally.⁴⁰ This creates a complex religious environment with both highly committed individuals and a large unaffiliated population. Ministry strategies need to cater to this spectrum, understanding the intersection of faith, race, ethnicity, and socio-political views to foster unity and conduct effective, inclusive outreach.

D. Educational Environment

Palmetto residents primarily attend schools within the Fulton County School System, though proximity to Coweta County offers additional options.

- **School Zoning:** Palmetto Elementary School is located within the city and serves local students.⁵⁸ Based on typical feeder patterns, students likely advance to Bear Creek Middle School and Creekside High School, both part of Fulton County Schools. However, due to Palmetto's location near the county line, some addresses might be zoned for Coweta County schools, or families might utilize charter options or Coweta schools like Brooks Elementary, Madras Middle, or Northgate High.⁵⁸ Verification using the Fulton County Schools address locator is necessary for specific addresses.⁸⁶
- **School Ratings Summary (Niche Grades):** The perceived quality of public schools serving the Palmetto area presents a mixed picture, particularly between elementary and secondary levels.⁵⁸

School Type	School Name	District/Type	Grades Served	Niche Grade	Notes
Elementary	Brooks Elementary School	Coweta County	PK, K-5	A	#131 in GA; Serves area near county line
Elementary/ Middle	Amana Academy Charter School	Fulton Charter	K-8	A	#142 Elem in GA
Elementary	Arbor Springs Elementary School	Coweta County	PK, K-5	A-	#310 in GA
Elementary	Wolf Creek Elementary School	Fulton County	PK, K-5	B+	#440 in GA
Elementary	Palmetto Elementary School	Fulton County	PK, K-5	B	#517 in GA; Located in city; Mixed reviews ⁶²

Elementary/ Middle	Odyssey Charter School	Coweta Charter	K-8	B	#533 Elem in GA
Elementary/ Middle	The Main Street Academy	Fulton Charter	K-8	B	#665 Elem in GA
Elementary	E.C. West Elementary School	Fulton County	PK, K-5	B-	
Middle	Madras Middle School	Coweta County	6-8	A-	#76 in GA; Serves area near county line
Middle	KIPP South Fulton Academy School	Fulton Charter	5-8	B-	
Middle	Bear Creek Middle School	Fulton County	6-8	C+	Likely zoned middle for parts of Palmetto
High	Northgate High School	Coweta County	9-12	A-	#68 in GA; Serves area near county line
High	Independenc e High School	Fulton County	9-12	C+	Alternative/s maller setting
High	Hapeville Charter Career Academy	Fulton Charter	9-12	C	Career focus
High	Creekside High School	Fulton County	9-12	C	Likely zoned high for

					parts of Palmetto
High	Skyview High School	Fulton County	9-12	D-	

Note: School zoning requires address verification. Grades based on Niche.com data.⁵⁸ Critiques exist regarding the methodology of school rating sites.⁸⁸

- **Educational Landscape:** Similar to Chattahoochee Hills, families in Palmetto have access to some well-regarded elementary options, particularly through charter schools or potentially Coweta County zoning (Brooks, Amana, Arbor Springs). Palmetto Elementary itself holds a 'B' grade but has received mixed reviews.⁶² However, the likely zoned Fulton County public middle school (Bear Creek) and high schools (Creekside, etc.) generally receive lower ratings (C+ or below). While higher-rated secondary options exist nearby in Coweta County (Madras Middle, Northgate High), access depends on specific zoning. This pattern suggests potential challenges for families seeking high-performing public secondary education within their immediate Fulton zone. Given Palmetto's lower average income and educational attainment profile compared to Chattahoochee Hills, accessing private school alternatives⁵⁹ may be more difficult for local families. This situation creates opportunities for church ministries focused on educational support, such as tutoring, mentoring, or after-school programs. Partnerships with or direct support for the lower-rated local schools could represent a significant avenue for community service and outreach.

E. Strategic Implications Summary for Palmetto

- **Outreach:** Outreach must be intentionally cross-cultural and contextually relevant, reflecting the majority Black and large Hispanic populations. Consider the need for Spanish-language resources or ministries. Strategies should address the practical needs that may arise from lower average income levels. Engaging the relatively large renter population requires different approaches than focusing solely on homeowners. Connecting with the substantial (likely 25-35%) unaffiliated population necessitates creative, non-traditional methods sensitive to potential institutional skepticism.
- **Ministry Focus:** Ministries should cater to diverse household structures, offering support for singles, single parents, and potentially divorced or widowed individuals alongside traditional family programs. Given the high median age, senior adult ministry is a crucial area. Addressing financial pressures through

literacy programs or practical assistance could meet significant needs. Youth ministry should acknowledge the lower average educational attainment levels and consider partnerships offering educational support. Navigating the community's diverse theological landscape, including varying expressions of faith commitment and potentially differing views associated with Christian Nationalism across ethnic groups, requires wisdom and sensitivity.

- **Church Planting/Congregations:** Opportunities exist for congregations that authentically reflect and serve Palmetto's racial and economic diversity. Planting efforts should consider the balanced renter/homeowner mix and the overall economic profile. Building bridges through community-focused initiatives – such as educational support, job skills training, or partnerships addressing local needs – could be particularly effective for connecting with residents, including the unaffiliated.

IV. Regional Religious Context & The Unaffiliated

Understanding the specific dynamics of Chattahoochee Hills and Palmetto requires placing them within the broader religious context of the Atlanta region, Georgia, and the South, particularly concerning the rise of the religiously unaffiliated.

A. Broader Religious Trends (South/Georgia/Atlanta)

The American South, including Georgia, remains the most heavily Christian region of the country. However, it is not immune to the national trend of declining Christian affiliation.²⁶ While the decline in the South may be slower than in other regions, it is evident. Pew Research Center data shows Christian identification in Georgia dropped from 79% in 2014 to 67% in 2024, though it has shown signs of stabilizing in the most recent years.²⁶ This decline nationally and regionally is driven primarily by decreases among White Christians, both Evangelical and Mainline Protestants.²⁰ Conversely, the proportions of Christians who are Black or Hispanic have remained more stable or even increased as a share of the Christian population.³²

Despite shifts in affiliation, belief in God or a higher power remains widespread. National surveys consistently show large majorities believe in God or a universal spirit (83%), a soul (86%), and an afterlife (70%).²⁹ However, traditional religious practice, particularly weekly church attendance, continues to decline across most groups. The Atlanta metropolitan area reflects this complexity, exhibiting high overall religious diversity with significant representation from various Christian traditions (Evangelical, Mainline, Black Protestant, Catholic, Orthodox) as well as substantial non-Christian

communities (Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist).³⁰

B. The Religiously Unaffiliated ("Nones")

The most significant shift in the American religious landscape over the past two decades has been the rise of the religiously unaffiliated – those who identify as atheist, agnostic, or "nothing in particular."

- **Growth and Profile:** Nationally, this group surged from 16% in 2007 to 29% by 2021-2023, although this rapid growth appears to have leveled off in the last few years.²⁶ Georgia (26%) and the Atlanta metro area (25%) mirror this substantial presence.²⁸ Demographically, the "nones" skew significantly younger than affiliated Christians; their median age nationally is around 38-41, compared to 54 for Christians.²⁰ This trend is particularly pronounced among Gen Z and Millennials.²⁰ While historically more male, the gender ratio among the unaffiliated has become more balanced.³² They tend to have higher educational attainment than the Christian average and lean more politically liberal or Democratic.²⁹ While present across all regions, they are somewhat less concentrated in the South compared to Christians.³⁵
- **Beliefs and Practices:** It is crucial to recognize that "unaffiliated" does not necessarily mean "non-believer." The category includes distinct subgroups: atheists (around 5% nationally), agnostics (around 6%), and the largest group, "nothing in particular" (around 19%).²⁷ Many within the "nothing in particular" segment retain spiritual beliefs, including belief in God or a higher power, but reject institutional religious labels and structures.³¹ Unsurprisingly, religious service attendance among all unaffiliated groups is extremely low.
- **Significance for Ministry:** The religiously unaffiliated represent a large, diverse, and growing segment of the population in both Chattahoochee Hills and Palmetto, likely constituting between 20% and 35% of residents depending on the specific community profile. They are a key demographic, especially younger adults, that traditional church models often fail to reach. Effective engagement requires recognizing the diversity within this group – distinguishing between atheists/agnostics and the potentially spiritually seeking "nothing in particular" cohort. Strategies must move beyond simply inviting people to existing church services. Emphasis should be placed on building authentic relationships, demonstrating relevance through community service, fostering genuine community, and addressing spiritual questions and existential needs in accessible, non-dogmatic ways. The reasons individuals become unaffiliated are complex, often involving negative experiences with organized religion,

disagreement with teachings, or simply a gradual drifting away; understanding these factors is essential for meaningful connection.

V. Conclusion & Overall Strategic Considerations

This analysis reveals two distinct communities within the broader South Fulton/North Coweta landscape, each presenting unique opportunities and challenges for church ministry. Chattahoochee Hills emerges as an affluent, highly educated, and relatively older community with strong family structures and high homeownership, predominantly White but experiencing diversification. Palmetto presents a more working-class profile with a significantly older median age, greater racial/ethnic diversity (majority Black with a large Hispanic minority), lower educational attainment, and a more balanced mix of renters and homeowners.

A. Synthesis of Findings

Despite their differences, both municipalities share common threads. They are embedded within the growing and diversifying Atlanta metropolitan region. Both likely host a significant and growing population of religiously unaffiliated individuals, mirroring state and national trends, particularly among younger generations not fully captured by median age statistics. Both communities also appear to face challenges related to the perceived quality of their zoned public secondary schools, a factor that can significantly impact family decisions and community composition. Furthermore, both areas likely reflect the national pattern of declining active religious participation (e.g., weekly attendance) even among those who retain some form of religious affiliation or belief.

B. Overarching Opportunities and Challenges

- **Opportunities:** The increasing diversity in both areas offers rich potential for building multi-ethnic, culturally vibrant congregations. Addressing the specific demographic needs – such as senior care and engagement in both communities, family support in Chattahoochee Hills, and financial/educational support in Palmetto – provides clear avenues for service and connection. The large segment of religiously unaffiliated residents, many of whom may still hold spiritual beliefs, represents a significant field for innovative outreach and relationship-building beyond traditional church structures.
- **Challenges:** Navigating the potential social and political divides stemming from differences in race, ethnicity, economic status, educational background, and political ideology (including the presence of Christian Nationalism) requires

intentional effort towards unity and understanding. Reversing or mitigating the trend of declining active church participation is a major hurdle. Developing effective, authentic strategies to connect with the diverse group of "nones" remains a critical challenge for contemporary churches. Resource allocation may also be a challenge, given the differing economic profiles of the two communities.

C. Potential Strategic Directions for Church Leadership

Based on the demographic and religious landscapes analyzed, the following strategic directions are suggested for consideration:

- 1. Develop Tailored Community Strategies:** Recognize the distinct character of Chattahoochee Hills and Palmetto. Implement ministry and outreach plans specifically designed for each community's unique demographics, economic realities, cultural composition, and religious landscape. Avoid a uniform approach across both locations.
- 2. Prioritize Authentic Community Engagement:** Move beyond attractional models focused solely on Sunday services. Invest heavily in building relationships within the broader community through consistent presence, active listening, and meaningful service. Partner with local schools, civic organizations, and community initiatives. This is vital for reaching renters in Palmetto and the unaffiliated in both areas.
- 3. Intentionally Embrace and Reflect Diversity:** Actively work to create church communities where people from all racial, ethnic, and socio-economic backgrounds feel welcomed and valued. Ensure leadership and ministry expressions reflect the diversity present, particularly in Palmetto. Explore Spanish-language resources or ministries where needed.
- 4. Innovate for the Religiously Unaffiliated:** Experiment with diverse ministry formats beyond traditional worship services. Consider launching small groups focused on specific interests or life stages, online engagement platforms, community service projects as primary outreach, or forums for open discussion about faith and doubt. Emphasize authenticity, community, and addressing spiritual questions over immediate institutional commitment.
- 5. Bridge Generational Divides:** Implement specific strategies to engage younger adults and youth, who are disproportionately represented among the unaffiliated and less likely to attend traditional services. Foster intergenerational relationships through mentorship programs, shared activities, and opportunities for mutual

learning. Ensure ministry addresses the unique needs and perspectives of the significant older adult populations in both communities.

6. **Leverage Community Strengths:** Utilize the high concentration of educated professionals in Chattahoochee Hills for leadership development, teaching ministries, and strategic planning. Tap into the potential for strong community bonds suggested by high homeownership in Chattahoochee Hills and the established nature of Palmetto.
7. **Commit to Ongoing Learning and Adaptation:** Regularly monitor demographic and religious trends using available data sources (Census, ARC, thearda.com, Pew, PRRI). Be prepared to adapt ministry strategies and approaches as the communities continue to evolve over the coming decade toward 2035.

By grounding strategic decisions in a clear understanding of the unique people and contexts within Chattahoochee Hills and Palmetto, church leadership can more effectively fulfill its mission to serve these communities and engage all residents, including those currently outside the bounds of traditional religious affiliation.

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