

Airport Cities: Demographic, Religious, and Sociocultural Analysis of Select South Metro Atlanta Municipalities: Strategic Implications for Church Leadership (2015-2035)

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I. Introduction

- **Purpose:** This report provides church leadership with a comprehensive demographic, religious, and sociocultural analysis of five key communities in South Metro Atlanta: the cities of South Fulton, East Point, College Park, and Riverdale, along with the unincorporated area of Red Oak (represented by Census Designated Place and ZIP code data). The analysis covers the period from approximately 2015 to 2025, with projections extending to 2035. The primary objective is to furnish actionable intelligence to inform strategic decisions regarding outreach priorities, ministry focus areas, effective community engagement strategies, and potential church planting initiatives specifically targeting populations unaffiliated with a local church.
- **Scope & Methodology:** The analysis encompasses the five specified geographic areas within Fulton and Clayton counties. It examines key demographic indicators (population trends, age distribution, household composition, income levels, poverty rates, racial/ethnic diversity, educational attainment, housing tenure), religious affiliation based on data from the Association of Religion Data Archives (ARDA), worldview inferences drawn from demographic and socioeconomic patterns, educational landscape assessments using school rating data (Niche, GreatSchools), and lifestyle characteristics inferred from demographic data and ESRI Tapestry Segmentation concepts. Population projections utilize data from the Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC) and the Georgia Governor's Office of Planning and Budget (OPB). The analysis consistently evaluates findings from the perspective of a church leadership team seeking to understand and effectively serve these communities, with a particular focus on reaching unaffiliated individuals. Red Oak, being an unincorporated Census Designated Place (CDP), presents data limitations; ZIP code data (30349) and data from the similar Redan CDP are used as proxies where necessary, with limitations noted.
- **Structure:** The report begins with a regional overview of South Metro Atlanta, focusing on Fulton and Clayton Counties, to establish context. It then provides detailed profiles for each of the five municipalities/areas, including demographic trends, religious and worldview analysis, educational landscape,

psychographic/lifestyle indicators, and specific strategic implications for church leadership. Following the individual profiles, a comparative analysis highlights key differences and similarities across the areas. The report then examines future projections and trends through 2035 before concluding with overall strategic recommendations for ministry engagement in the region.

II. South Metro Atlanta Regional Context (Fulton & Clayton Counties)

- **Purpose:** Understanding the broader dynamics of Fulton and Clayton counties is essential for contextualizing the specific characteristics and challenges of the municipalities within them. These counties exhibit distinct demographic and socioeconomic profiles that shape the environment for ministry and outreach in the South Metro region.
- **Fulton County Overview:**
 - **Demographics:** Fulton County is Georgia's most populous county, with an estimated 1,079,105 residents in 2023 and continued growth projected.¹ The median age is relatively young at 36.8 years.² Racially and ethnically, the county is highly diverse and nearing a "majority-minority" status, with recent estimates showing approximately 45.1% Black/African American, 44.0% White, 8.2% Asian, and 8.2% Hispanic/Latino populations.¹ Educational attainment is notably high, with 58.0% to 59.5% of adults aged 25+ holding a bachelor's degree or higher.¹ Median household income is also high, estimated between \$91,490 and \$95,371 (2019-2023/2023 ACS), significantly exceeding state and national averages.¹ The poverty rate hovers around 13.0%.¹ It is critical to note, however, that Fulton County exhibits significant internal variation, with the northern part generally being more affluent and whiter, while the southern part (relevant to this report) is predominantly Black and includes areas with both high affluence (South Fulton city) and significant poverty (parts of Atlanta, College Park, East Point).
 - **Religious Landscape (ARDA - Fulton County):** The 2020 ARDA data indicates a high level of overall religious adherence in Fulton County, with 67.2% of the population affiliated with reporting religious bodies.⁴ This still leaves a substantial unaffiliated population, estimated at approximately 32.8%, representing a significant potential focus for outreach. The religious landscape is diverse. Major Christian traditions include the Catholic Church (174,520 adherents), United Methodist Church (98,864), National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc. (69,932), Southern Baptist Convention (63,257), and various Non-denominational Christian churches (54,470). Significant Black

Protestant denominations beyond National Baptists, such as the AME Church (10,040), are also present.⁴ Furthermore, Fulton County has considerable non-Christian populations, including an estimated 29,878 Muslims and a notable Jewish community (Reform Judaism alone counts 12,328 adherents).⁴ This religious pluralism necessitates nuanced engagement strategies.

- **Socioeconomic Dynamics:** While the county-wide median income is high, income distribution shows disparities, with 28% of households earning under \$50K and 20% earning over \$200K.² The median value of owner-occupied housing is high (\$431,200), but the overall homeownership rate is relatively low at 54.1%, indicating a large renter population, particularly concentrated within the City of Atlanta and adjacent areas.¹ The population is also quite mobile, with Census Reporter data suggesting around 16% of residents moved within the past year (7% within county, 4% from different county, 3% from different state, 1% from abroad), higher than state and national averages.²
- **Clayton County Overview:**
 - **Demographics:** Clayton County had a population of 298,300 according to the 2023 ACS 1-year estimate.⁶ The population grew significantly between 2010 and 2020.⁷ The median age is younger than Fulton County's, at 34 years.⁶ Clayton County is predominantly Black/African American (69%), with large and growing Hispanic (14%) and Asian (5%) communities; the White non-Hispanic population constitutes about 8%.⁶ Educational attainment is considerably lower than in Fulton County, with about 26% of adults 25+ holding a bachelor's degree or higher.⁶ Median household income is also lower, around \$58,359, and the poverty rate is higher, at approximately 16.7%.⁶
 - **Religious Landscape (ARDA - Clayton County):** Clayton County presents a starkly different religious profile compared to Fulton. The overall adherence rate reported by ARDA in 2020 was only 45.7%, suggesting a very large unaffiliated population of approximately 54.3%.⁹ This segment represents the majority of residents and is a primary consideration for church outreach. Among the affiliated, Non-denominational Christian churches are the largest group (33,060 adherents), followed by the Southern Baptist Convention (26,612). A highly significant finding is the large Hindu population, with 21,000 adherents reported for traditional temples, making it the third-largest religious group in the county data.⁹ This is likely linked to the presence of major temples, such as the Hindu Temple of Atlanta located in Riverdale.¹⁰

Other significant groups include the Catholic Church (18,097), National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc. (7,100), and an estimated 5,592 Muslims.⁹ The religious landscape is thus characterized by lower overall Christian affiliation, a massive unaffiliated segment, and significant non-Christian religious communities.

- **Socioeconomic Dynamics:** Lower median incomes and higher poverty rates define Clayton County's economy relative to Fulton.⁶ Housing is generally more affordable than in Fulton, though values are rising. Transportation and warehousing, retail trade, and healthcare are major employment sectors. Commute times tend to be longer than in Fulton, averaging around 32 minutes.⁶ The county has a higher percentage of foreign-born residents (around 15%) compared to the state average.⁶
- **Regional Dynamics and Implications:** The juxtaposition of these two counties reveals critical context for the municipalities studied. South Fulton, East Point, College Park (partially), and Red Oak reside within Fulton County, inheriting its general affluence and high educational attainment trends, but representing the predominantly Black southern sector which also contains significant economic diversity and challenges. Riverdale and the other part of College Park are in Clayton County, reflecting its younger median age, lower income and education levels, higher poverty, significant Hispanic and Asian populations (including the large Hindu community), and a markedly higher rate of religious non-affiliation. This contrast underscores that ministry strategies cannot be uniform across the South Metro area; approaches must be tailored to the specific demographic, socioeconomic, and religious realities of each community and its county context.

The prevalence of large unaffiliated populations in both counties, dramatically so in Clayton, highlights a vast field for potential outreach and new church development focused on those outside existing religious structures. Furthermore, the data for areas like the City of South Fulton points to a substantial and growing Black middle and upper-middle class¹³, a demographic whose experiences, values, and needs may differ from historical assumptions and require specific, culturally attuned ministry approaches that acknowledge both privilege and potential unique pressures.¹⁵

III. Municipality Profile: City of South Fulton

- A. Demographic Snapshot & Trends (2015-2025):
The City of South Fulton, incorporated in 2017, represents a unique and rapidly

solidifying demographic profile within the Atlanta region. As of 2023, the estimated population was 110,920, reflecting a growth of 2.7% since the 2020 Census base estimate of 108,050.¹³ While 10-year trend data for the city itself is limited due to its recent incorporation, the area it encompasses has clearly experienced growth.

The age structure indicates a community conducive to families, with 26.2% of the population under 18 years old. However, there is also a notable and likely growing senior population, with 11.3% aged 65 and over.¹³ Racially and ethnically, South Fulton is remarkably homogeneous, with 91.4% of residents identifying as Black or African American alone. White residents make up only 3.6%, Hispanic/Latinos 3.2%, and Asians 0.9%.¹³ This concentration simplifies certain aspects of cultural targeting but necessitates an understanding of the diversity *within* the Black community.

Household characteristics point towards stability and investment. The owner-occupancy rate is very high at 70.0%, significantly above the Fulton County average. Households are relatively large, with an average of 2.75 persons, and residents exhibit low mobility, with 89.9% having lived in the same house one year prior.¹³ Economically, South Fulton stands out for its affluence. The median household income (2019-2023, in 2023 dollars) was \$81,798, placing it among the most affluent majority-Black cities in the region and well above county and state averages.¹³ Correspondingly, the poverty rate is relatively low at 9.9%.¹³ This economic strength is mirrored in educational attainment: 93.0% of adults 25+ are high school graduates or higher, and an impressive 38.9% hold a bachelor's degree or higher.¹³

The housing market reflects this profile, with high homeownership and a median owner-occupied housing value of \$270,600 (2019-2023).¹³ Median gross rent was 1,607

- **B. Religious Affiliation & Worldview:**

Given South Fulton's location within Fulton County and its demographic makeup, the county's ARDA data serves as a reasonable proxy.⁴ A significant presence of historically Black Protestant denominations (e.g., National Baptist Convention, AME, Church of God in Christ) is highly likely, alongside other major traditions like Catholic and United Methodist churches, and a growing number of Non-denominational congregations. While overall adherence in Fulton County is high (67.2%), this still implies an estimated unaffiliated population of around 32.8%

within South Fulton, representing a substantial group potentially open to outreach.⁴

The worldview within this predominantly Black, affluent, and educated community is likely complex. Traditional Black church values emphasizing faith, family, and community resilience probably resonate strongly. However, the area's affluence might also foster acceptance of or alignment with prosperity theology, elements of which are present in some large churches in the broader South Metro area.⁵

High educational attainment could correlate with more intellectual, questioning, or progressive approaches to faith and social issues among some residents.

Afrocentric perspectives and a strong sense of cultural identity are also probable influences. It is crucial to avoid monolithic assumptions; worldview will vary based on age, specific church background (or lack thereof), socioeconomic experiences, and individual beliefs. The unique pressures and experiences of the Black middle and upper-middle class, such as navigating predominantly white professional spaces or balancing success with community ties, may also shape perspectives.¹⁵

- **C. Educational Landscape:**

South Fulton is served by the Fulton County School System (FCS), which receives an overall "A" grade from Niche and is ranked highly for diversity.¹⁶ However, school performance within the South Fulton area appears mixed based on available ratings. Schools like Wolf Creek Elementary (B+ Niche, 6/10 GreatSchools), Stonewall Tell Elementary (B Niche, 5/10 GS), Camp Creek Middle (B Niche, 5/10 GS), Sandtown Middle (B- Niche), and Westlake High (B Niche) show average to slightly above-average performance on these platforms.¹⁷ KIPP South Fulton Academy, a charter school serving grades 5-8, has a B- Niche grade.¹⁹ While FCS provides a strong district-level framework, the variability in specific school ratings suggests that educational quality and resources might differ across neighborhoods within South Fulton. It's also important to consider critiques that platforms like GreatSchools may correlate with socioeconomic status rather than purely educational effectiveness.²⁰ The presence of charter options like KIPP indicates parental demand for alternatives or specialized programs.¹⁹

- **D. Psychographic & Lifestyle Indicators:**

ESRI Tapestry Segmentation provides a framework for understanding lifestyles based on demographics. South Fulton's profile—affluent, educated, family-oriented homeowners, predominantly Black, in a suburban setting—aligns well with characteristics found in segments within LifeMode 4: Family

Landscapes. This group typically consists of successful young families in suburban or semirural settings, often in their first homes, with a focus on children's activities and community life.²¹ Aspects might also overlap with LifeMode 1: Affluent Estates (established wealth, educated, quality-focused) or LifeMode 5: GenXurban (stable Gen X homeowners, comfortable jobs, wise budgeting).²¹

The lifestyle is likely characterized by professional careers, demanding schedules, and family-centered activities revolving around schools, parks (like those mentioned in Sandtown Falls community descriptions ²³), and community events. Homeownership is central, implying a focus on home maintenance, improvement, and community stability.²⁵ Commutes can be significant, with a mean travel time of 32.6 minutes.¹³ High computer and broadband internet usage (97.7% and 94.7% respectively) suggests residents are digitally connected and receptive to online communication and services.¹³ A strong community identity, possibly built around shared socioeconomic success, cultural background, and civic pride in the relatively new city, is probable.²⁵ Lifestyle publications targeting the area emphasize home, health, family, and community amenities.²⁵

- **E. Strategic Implications for Church Leadership:**

- **Outreach:** Ministry outreach should be tailored towards professionals, established families, and homeowners. High-quality programming, particularly for children and youth, is essential to attract and retain families. Given the high education levels, intellectual engagement through teaching and discussion groups will likely be valued. Digital outreach strategies are highly viable due to widespread internet access.¹³ Outreach should focus on building relationships, fostering spiritual growth, and addressing the unique pressures that can accompany professional success and busy family lives, rather than assuming primarily economic needs.¹⁵
- **Ministry Focus:** Key areas include robust family ministries, marriage enrichment programs, youth development focusing on leadership and academic excellence, professional networking opportunities within a faith context, and financial stewardship education relevant to an affluent population. Ministries addressing the specific social and cultural experiences of the Black middle and upper-middle class could provide significant value and connection.¹⁵ Tapping into the existing civic pride and community identity could also be fruitful.²⁵

- **Community Engagement:** Partnerships with local schools (potentially offering support to address performance variations), homeowner associations, local businesses, and civic groups are crucial. Engagement should focus on enhancing quality of life, supporting families, and contributing to community well-being.
- **New Congregations:** A new church seeking to reach South Fulton residents, including the estimated 33% unaffiliated, would likely need to offer excellence in execution: high-quality worship experiences, compelling and relevant teaching, outstanding children's and youth ministries, and well-organized small groups focused on building authentic community among busy people. The model must resonate with an educated, discerning, and relatively affluent audience. Understanding why the unaffiliated have chosen that path—be it skepticism, negative past experiences, time constraints, or perceived irrelevance—is key to developing an effective approach.

IV. Municipality Profile: City of East Point

- A. Demographic Snapshot & Trends (2015-2025):
East Point presents a more complex demographic picture than South Fulton. Its population was estimated at 38,233 in 2023, showing relative stability in recent years after experiencing a decline between 2000 and 2010 followed by a rebound.²⁶

The median age is 35.4 years, slightly younger than regional and national averages, with 24.4% of residents under 18 and 9.9% aged 65 and over.²⁶ This suggests a mix of working-age adults, families, and some seniors. East Point is racially diverse, though still predominantly Black/African American (75.7% - 77.0%). There are substantial White (10.2% - 12.1%) and Hispanic/Latino (10.2%) populations, making it significantly more diverse than South Fulton.²⁶

Household characteristics differ markedly from South Fulton. The owner-occupancy rate is much lower at 43.7%, indicating a majority renter population.²⁶ Households are slightly smaller on average (2.30 persons), and residential mobility is higher, with only 80.2% living in the same house one year prior.²⁶ The foreign-born population is around 6.1%.²⁸

Economically, East Point faces greater challenges. The median household income was \$58,983 (2019-2023), having slightly declined recently, and is considerably lower than in South Fulton.²⁶ The poverty rate is significantly higher, reported

between 20.7%²⁷ and 23.2%.²⁶ Despite lower incomes, educational attainment is relatively high: 89.6% of adults 25+ have a high school diploma or higher, and 36.2% hold a bachelor's degree or higher – comparable to South Fulton.²⁶ This disparity between education and income might suggest underemployment, recent graduates, or a workforce concentrated in lower-paying service sectors despite educational credentials.

The housing market reflects the lower homeownership rate, with a median owner-occupied home value of \$247,500 and a median gross rent of 1,314(2019–2023).

- **B. Religious Affiliation & Worldview:**

Using Fulton County ARDA data as a proxy 4, East Point likely hosts a strong presence of Black Protestant denominations, Catholic churches (serving both Black and Hispanic residents), Methodist congregations, and Non-denominational groups. Given the city's diversity, specific Hispanic Protestant or Catholic congregations are probable. The estimated unaffiliated rate for the county is around 33%, suggesting a significant segment in East Point may not be connected to traditional religious institutions.4

Worldviews are expected to be diverse, reflecting the mix of races, ethnicities, socioeconomic statuses, and age groups. Traditional Black church values likely hold sway for many, while the Hispanic population brings Catholic and potentially Evangelical Protestant influences. The younger, educated demographic might hold more secular or progressive views. Concerns about economic justice, racial equity, housing affordability, and gentrification, evident in resident feedback²⁹, likely shape the social consciousness and worldview of many residents, potentially influencing their expectations of community institutions, including churches.

- **C. Educational Landscape:**

East Point is served primarily by Fulton County Schools (FCS) 16 and some Atlanta Public Schools zones may overlap. The area boasts several highly-rated charter schools, including Resurgence Hall (Niche Grade A) and Amana Academy (Niche Grade A).18 Other public schools like Wolf Creek Elementary (B+), Stonewall Tell Elementary (B), Camp Creek Middle (B), Westlake High (B), The Main Street Academy (B), KIPP South Fulton (B-), and Sandtown Middle (B-) generally receive average to good ratings on Niche.18 This suggests that while FCS provides a solid district framework, the proliferation of charter schools indicates significant parental engagement and demand for diverse educational options. The overall

quality appears somewhat higher and more consistent than in neighboring College Park or Riverdale, though the critique regarding rating systems correlating with demographics remains relevant.²⁰

- **D. Psychographic & Lifestyle Indicators:**

East Point's diverse demographic and socioeconomic mix makes it difficult to assign a single ESRI Tapestry LifeMode profile. Pockets of younger, educated renters might fit LifeMode 3: Uptown Individuals or LifeMode 11: Midtown Singles.²¹ Established neighborhoods with homeowners could resemble segments within LifeMode 5: GenXurban (like 5C Parks and Rec, characterized by older homes and budget consciousness 32) or LifeMode 8: Middle Ground (representing thirtysomethings with mixed tenure and class backgrounds 21).

Lifestyles likely vary significantly. There are young professionals, families managing tight budgets, established homeowners invested in the community, and seniors. The average commute time is 29.6 minutes.²⁸ Resident reviews and surveys reveal a complex picture: appreciation for parks, local businesses, growing diversity, and community improvements, but also significant concerns about crime (particularly property crime and occasional violent crime), housing affordability, rising taxes, and displacement.²⁹ There is a stated desire for more community amenities like safe sidewalks, community centers, retail options, job training resources (especially post-COVID), and cultural events celebrating diversity.²⁹ This indicates an engaged populace seeking improvements in quality of life and economic opportunity.

- **E. Strategic Implications for Church Leadership:**

- **Outreach:** Requires multifaceted strategies to connect with diverse groups: renters and homeowners, young adults and families, Black, White, and Hispanic residents. Outreach must address both spiritual needs and pressing practical concerns like economic stability, safety, and housing.²⁹ Leveraging the community's expressed desire for cultural events and public art could be an effective engagement point.²⁹
- **Ministry Focus:** Ministries focused on economic empowerment (e.g., partnerships for job training, financial literacy workshops), advocacy and support related to affordable housing, youth mentoring programs, and cross-cultural fellowship are highly relevant. Support groups for singles and families facing economic stress could meet significant needs.

- **Community Engagement:** Collaboration with local businesses, well-regarded schools (especially charters), city government (addressing resident concerns highlighted in surveys ²⁹), and non-profits working on safety, housing, and workforce development is essential. Participating in or hosting events that celebrate the city's cultural diversity could build bridges.²⁹
- **New Congregations:** East Point offers potential for various church models. A community-centric church actively addressing social needs and promoting justice could resonate deeply. A contemporary service targeting the younger, educated demographic might attract those moving into revitalized areas. A Spanish-language or bilingual ministry is needed to serve the Hispanic population effectively. Reaching the estimated 33% unaffiliated likely requires demonstrating relevance to daily life struggles, fostering authentic community, and engaging with social issues constructively.

V. Municipality Profile: City of College Park

- A. Demographic Snapshot & Trends (2015-2025):
 The City of College Park, straddling Fulton and Clayton counties near Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport, presents a profile marked by youth and economic challenges. The city's population is relatively small, estimated at 13,969 in 2023, and has shown a slight decline in recent years.³⁴ Note: Care must be taken with data, as some sources might refer only to the Fulton or Clayton portion, or the distinct College Park CCD in Clayton.³⁷ The primary figures used here ³⁴ appear to represent the city entity.
 College Park has a notably young population, with a median age of just 31.3 years. This is reflected in the high percentage of residents under 18 (27.7%) and a low percentage aged 65 and over (8.6%).³⁴ The city is predominantly Black/African American (82.3% - 82.4%), with smaller White (8.8% - 9.3%) and Hispanic/Latino (3.7%) populations.³⁴ A small percentage (6.6%) of the population is foreign-born.³⁵

A defining characteristic is the extremely low homeownership rate, at only 22.1%.³⁴ This indicates a community dominated by renters. Correspondingly, residential mobility is high, with only 82.5% living in the same house one year prior.³⁵ Average household size is 2.34 persons.³⁵

Economically, College Park faces significant hurdles. It has the lowest median household income among the municipalities studied, at \$48,505 (2019-2023), which actually represented a slight increase recently.³⁴ The poverty rate is high at

20.6% and saw a sharp increase between 2022 and 2023.³⁴ Educational attainment shows a mix: a solid high school graduation rate (89.6% of adults 25+), but a lower percentage with a bachelor's degree or higher (28.2%) compared to South Fulton and East Point.³⁴

The housing market is characterized by its overwhelming renter majority. While the median home value has risen sharply to \$314,500 (indicating gentrification pressure or investment activity), the low ownership rate persists.³⁴ Median gross rent was 1,131(2019–2023).[35] This suggests a challenging environment for renters facing rising costs alongside low incomes.

The key trend for College Park is that of a young, transient, predominantly Black city heavily reliant on rental housing. It faces substantial economic hardship (low income, high poverty, rising housing costs) despite its strategic location near the airport and MARTA transit.

- **B. Religious Affiliation & Worldview:**

College Park spans both Fulton and Clayton counties, so its religious landscape likely reflects elements of both ARDA profiles.⁴ A strong presence of Black Protestant denominations is expected. Given the high poverty levels, younger demographic, and transient population, Non-denominational and Pentecostal expressions of Christianity might be particularly prevalent or resonant. The rate of religious non-affiliation is likely high, potentially mirroring or exceeding Clayton County's 54.3%, especially among the younger, renter population.⁹

Worldviews may be significantly shaped by socioeconomic realities. Concerns about economic survival, justice, and opportunity are likely paramount for many. Youth culture and the perspectives of young adults will be influential given the low median age. Traditional Black church values may provide a foundation for some, but experiences of hardship or marginalization could also lead to cynicism, pragmatism, or disengagement from institutions perceived as ineffective or irrelevant. The city's official vision emphasizing hospitality, equity, and inclusion³⁹ suggests an aspirational community identity that may or may not align with the daily lived experiences of all residents.

- **C. Educational Landscape:**

The educational landscape in College Park is complex, served by both Fulton County Schools 16 and Clayton County Public Schools 8, depending on location. There is a notable presence of high-performing charter and magnet schools

accessible to residents, such as Elite Scholars Academy (Clayton Co., Niche Grade A), Resurgence Hall Charter (A), and Amana Academy Charter (A).⁴⁰ Woodward Academy, a large, highly-rated private school (A+), is also located in College Park, serving a different demographic.³¹ However, some traditional public schools serving the area have received lower ratings.⁶⁴ This creates a picture of significant disparity in educational opportunities, with highly-rated alternatives existing alongside potentially struggling neighborhood schools. Access to quality education is likely a major concern for families in the city. Again, the limitations of rating systems should be noted.²⁰

- **D. Psychographic & Lifestyle Indicators:**

Based on the high rentership, low income, young median age, predominance of Black residents, and urban setting near the airport, ESRI Tapestry segments likely fall within LifeMode 11: Midtown Singles (urban renters, service jobs, budget-conscious, diverse), LifeMode 12: Hometown (close-knit urban communities, older housing, working-class), or LifeMode 13: Next Wave (urban, diverse young families, renters, hardworking).²¹

Lifestyle is likely heavily influenced by work, particularly in sectors like transportation, warehousing, accommodation, and food services, which are major employers.³⁴ The short average commute time (22.6 minutes) suggests many residents work locally, likely at or near the airport.³⁴ Life may feel transient for the large renter population. Financial management and stretching limited incomes are likely daily realities for many. Despite challenges, the city government promotes a vision of hospitality, equity, and advancement³⁹, and significant development projects like Six West aim to create mixed-use centers, potentially altering the city's fabric and lifestyle over time.⁴²

- **E. Strategic Implications for Church Leadership:**

- **Outreach:** Outreach strategies must prioritize connecting with a young, predominantly renting population facing significant economic stress. This requires building relationships within apartment complexes and neighborhoods, potentially through partnerships with property managers or community centers. Addressing practical needs—such as job search assistance, financial counseling, affordable childcare information, and housing support resources—should be central to outreach efforts. Services need to be accessible to those working non-traditional hours (e.g., airport shift workers).
- **Ministry Focus:** Core ministries should include poverty alleviation initiatives,

workforce development partnerships, robust youth programs offering academic support and mentoring, singles ministry, and support networks for single-parent households. Given the transient nature of the population, ministries focused on rapid connection and building community for newcomers are essential.

- **Community Engagement:** Partnerships with social service agencies, job training programs, organizations focused on housing stability, and local schools (particularly those facing challenges) are critical. Engaging with the city's stated goals of equity and inclusion³⁹ provides common ground for collaboration.
- **New Congregations:** Church planting models emphasizing meeting immediate needs, tangible community service, and authentic, low-barrier relationships are likely to be most effective. Planting within apartment complexes or shared community spaces could overcome facility challenges. Simple or house church models might better suit a transient population. The very high potential unaffiliated rate requires innovative, non-traditional approaches that demonstrate practical care and relevance to the daily struggles and aspirations of residents, rather than relying solely on traditional attractional models.

VI. Municipality Profile: Red Oak (Census Designated Place / ZIP Code 30349 Proxy)

- A. Demographic Snapshot & Trends (2015-2025):
Red Oak is an unincorporated community located primarily within the City of South Fulton, often associated with the 30349 ZIP code. As it lacks distinct municipal data, analysis relies on proxy data from ZIP code 30349 and the demographically similar (though geographically distinct) Redan CDP.⁴⁴ These proxies must be interpreted with caution. The 30349 ZIP code area had a substantial population of 78,597 according to the 2023 ACS 5-year estimates.⁴⁵ The population in this area is relatively young, with a median age of 33.6 years for ZIP 30349.⁴⁵ Like the surrounding South Fulton city, the area is predominantly Black/African American (89% in ZIP 30349), with much smaller Hispanic (5%), White (3%), and Asian (1%) populations.⁴⁵ The foreign-born population in the ZIP code is notable at 8.8%.⁴⁵

Household characteristics suggest a mix of housing tenures. While specific homeownership rates for Red Oak or ZIP 30349 were not readily available in the snippets, data from the Redan CDP proxy shows a 58.6% owner-occupancy rate⁴⁴, suggesting more homeowners than in East Point or College Park, but fewer than in the more affluent parts of South Fulton city. Average household size in ZIP 30349 is 2.58 persons.⁴⁵

Economically, the Red Oak area appears more middle-income compared to the extremes of South Fulton city or College Park. Median household income for ZIP 30349 was \$63,000 (ACS 2023 5-yr)⁴⁵, similar to the Redan CDP proxy (\$63,226).⁴⁴ Poverty rates are moderate, around 11.9% (Redan CDP) to 13.1% (ZIP 30349).⁴⁴ Educational attainment is solid at the high school level (93.6% HS grad+ in Redan CDP), but lower for higher education compared to affluent South Fulton, with 27.7% (Redan CDP) to 32% (ZIP 30349) holding a bachelor's degree or higher.⁴⁴

The housing market reflects this middle-income profile. Median home values are more affordable than South Fulton city proper, estimated at \$197,600 (Redan CDP 2019-23) or \$245,000 (ZIP 30349 2023 5-yr).⁴⁴ Median gross rent was around 1,436.

- **B. Religious Affiliation & Worldview:**

As part of Fulton County, the ARDA data suggests an overall religious adherence rate around 67%, leaving approximately 33% unaffiliated.⁴ Given the predominantly Black population, Black Protestant denominations (Baptist, Methodist, Pentecostal) and Non-denominational churches are expected to be the most prevalent religious influences.

The worldview is likely diverse, blending traditional Christian faith perspectives with contemporary cultural influences. The moderate-income, working-class/middle-class profile might correlate with pragmatic values, a strong focus on family and community stability, and potentially more conservative social views compared to more affluent or highly educated areas. However, generational differences and individual experiences will create significant variation.

- **C. Educational Landscape:**

Schools serving the Red Oak area fall under the Fulton County School System.¹⁶

Specific school assignments depend on the exact address within the 30349 ZIP code or the broader Red Oak community.⁴⁶ Given the overlap with South Fulton city, East Point, and College Park boundaries, residents might be zoned to schools with varying performance levels, likely mirroring the mixed ratings observed in those adjacent areas. Accessing the district's address lookup tool is necessary for specific school information.⁴⁶ The overall district strength is positive 16, but neighborhood-level school quality may be a key factor for families. The critique of rating systems remains relevant.²⁰

- **D. Psychographic & Lifestyle Indicators:**

The area's demographic profile (moderate income, mixed housing tenure, family presence, suburban/urban periphery) suggests alignment with ESRI Tapestry segments like LifeMode 5: GenXurban, particularly segments like 5C: Parks and Rec. This segment is described as suburban, middle-income homeowners (often in older homes), budget-wise, family-oriented, and comfortable but not extravagant.³² Alternatively, LifeMode 8: Middle Ground (thirtysomethings, mixed tenure/class) or LifeMode 12: Hometown (diverse, working-class, community-focused) might also capture aspects of the Red Oak population.²¹

Lifestyle likely centers on work, family, and local community activities. Commutes may be significant (Redan CDP proxy showed 35.1 minutes ⁴⁴). Consumer behavior is likely practical and budget-conscious.³² High internet and computer use is probable (Redan CDP proxy ⁴⁴). Strong neighborhood bonds and participation in local events or organizations may be common.

- **E. Strategic Implications for Church Leadership:**

- **Outreach:** Focus on reaching working families, with strategies appealing to both homeowners and renters. Emphasize community building, family support, and practical faith application. Neighborhood-based outreach, school partnerships, and community events could be effective channels.
- **Ministry Focus:** Ministries supporting families (parenting classes, marriage support), robust youth and children's programs, financial management workshops, and small groups that foster deep community connections are likely needs.
- **Community Engagement:** Partnering with local schools, community associations, and potentially businesses along major corridors like Roosevelt Highway (US-29) would be beneficial. Addressing quality-of-life issues

relevant to working families (e.g., commute relief, after-school programs) can build goodwill.

- **New Congregations:** A church plant that feels authentic, community-oriented, and provides strong programs for children and youth could thrive. Accessibility and a welcoming atmosphere for working-class and middle-class families would be key. Reaching the estimated 33% unaffiliated requires building trust through consistent presence, relationship-building, and meeting tangible needs alongside spiritual ones.

VII. Municipality Profile: City of Riverdale

- A. Demographic Snapshot & Trends (2015-2025):

Riverdale, located in Clayton County, is a smaller city with a population estimated at 14,866 in 2023, showing relative stability or a slight decline in recent years.⁴⁸ However, the city serves as the core of a much larger surrounding community within the 30274 and 30296 ZIP codes, which together house over 62,000 people with similar demographics, indicating the city's data reflects a smaller part of a broader socio-geographic area.⁵²

Riverdale's median age is 38.6 years, older than College Park or Red Oak and closer to the national average, suggesting a more settled population with fewer young children compared to some other areas studied.⁴⁸ The city is predominantly Black/African American (85.2%), but features a notable Asian population (5.2%) and a White population (4.7%), making it distinct from the other heavily Black municipalities. The Hispanic/Latino population is smaller at 2.8%.⁴⁹ A significant characteristic is the high percentage of foreign-born residents, at 14.8%⁴⁹, contributing to the city's diversity.

Housing tenure is mixed, with an owner-occupancy rate of 52.5%, close to the national average but lower than South Fulton.⁴⁹ Average household size is around 2.45 persons for the city proper.⁵¹

Economically, Riverdale presents a moderate profile. Median household income was \$62,627 (2019-2023), showing a slight recent increase.⁴⁸ This is higher than College Park but lower than South Fulton. The poverty rate is 12.0%, lower than East Point and College Park.⁴⁹ A key differentiator is educational attainment, which is lower than in the Fulton County cities studied. While data varies slightly, recent

estimates show around 85% high school graduation rate but only about 19.1% of adults 25+ holding a bachelor's degree or higher.⁴⁹

The housing market is characterized by its relative affordability, with a median owner-occupied home value of 160,000(2019–2023).[49] This lower cost likely attracts residents and contributes to the mixed-tenure housing landscape. The key trend for Riverdale is its status as a stable, predominantly Black city within Clayton County, distinguished by its significant Asian minority, high foreign-born population, moderate incomes, lower educational attainment levels, affordable housing, and a mix of home owners and renters. Its location in Clayton County also links it to a very high regional rate of religious non-affiliation and a significant Hindu presence.

B. Religious Affiliation & Worldview:

Riverdale falls within Clayton County, which ARDA data indicates has a very high rate of religious non-affiliation, estimated at 54.3%.⁹ This means over half the population is likely unreached by or unengaged with traditional religious institutions. Among the affiliated population in the county, Non-denominational Christians (33k adherents), Southern Baptists (27k), Hindus (21k), Catholics (18k), National Baptists (7k), and Muslims (5.6k) are the most significant groups.⁹ The presence of the large Hindu Temple of Atlanta within Riverdale itself underscores the significance of the Hindu community locally.¹⁰

Worldviews in Riverdale are expected to be highly diverse, reflecting the mix of ethnicities (Black, Asian, White), the large foreign-born population, and the substantial number of religiously unaffiliated residents. Traditional Black Protestant values, beliefs associated with the significant Asian population (which may include Buddhism, Hinduism, or Christianity), and Islamic perspectives will coexist alongside secular or non-religious viewpoints. The presence of a major Hindu temple suggests a community where Hindu traditions are visible and practiced. The high number of unaffiliated individuals might indicate skepticism towards organized religion, adherence to non-institutional spirituality, or simply a lack of connection or engagement.

- #### C. Educational Landscape:

Riverdale is served by Clayton County Public Schools (CCPS), which holds an overall Niche grade of C+. Specific schools serving the city, such as Riverdale High School, Riverdale Middle School, and Riverdale Elementary School, generally receive lower ratings (C or C- on Niche).⁵³ Some sources show very low

GreatSchools ratings (e.g., 1/10 for Riverdale Middle 54). While Elite Scholars Academy (Niche Grade A) exists within Clayton County, access may be limited.⁵³ This aligns with the city's lower overall educational attainment figures and suggests that public school quality may be a significant concern for families residing in Riverdale. The critique regarding rating methodologies applies 20, but the consistency of lower ratings warrants attention.

- **D. Psychographic & Lifestyle Indicators:**

Considering Riverdale's moderate income, lower educational attainment, mixed housing tenure, and significant racial and ethnic diversity (including a large foreign-born segment), relevant ESRI Tapestry segments might include LifeMode 12: Hometown (described as diverse, working-class, often renters or owners of older homes, with strong community ties), or potentially aspects of LifeMode 7: Sprouting Explorers (young, diverse families, often multilingual, though typically more Hispanic than Riverdale's profile) or LifeMode 13: Next Wave (urban, diverse families, renters, hardworking, often foreign-born).²¹

Lifestyle likely revolves around work (with a relatively long average commute of 30.4 minutes ⁴⁹), family life, and engagement within specific cultural or religious communities due to the area's diversity. Consumer behavior may be more budget-conscious than in affluent South Fulton. City initiatives focus on community involvement, youth engagement (e.g., Youth Council, Summer Employment Program), beautification projects, and providing culturally diverse activities, indicating an effort to foster civic pride and engagement.⁵⁶ The presence of organizations like the Georgia Hispanic Chamber of Commerce engaging in local partnerships ⁵⁷ and various nonprofits serving diverse needs ⁵⁸ further illustrates the community's social fabric.

- **E. Strategic Implications for Church Leadership:**

- **Outreach:** Outreach must be intentionally multi-pronged to navigate the high levels of racial, ethnic, religious, and non-religious diversity. Strategies are needed to engage Black, Asian, and White residents, as well as the significant foreign-born population (potentially requiring ESL or culturally specific approaches). Acknowledging and respectfully coexisting with the large Hindu and Muslim communities is essential. The primary challenge and opportunity lie in connecting with the massive unaffiliated population (estimated over 54%).
- **Ministry Focus:** Cross-cultural ministry training and implementation are

paramount. Practical ministries like ESL programs, citizenship assistance, family support services, and youth mentoring (particularly given school ratings) are likely needed. Creating community-building events that intentionally bridge diverse groups could foster unity. Interfaith dialogue or collaboration on shared community concerns (e.g., supporting schools, neighborhood safety) might be appropriate.

- **Community Engagement:** Partnering with the diverse array of existing cultural and religious organizations, including the Hindu Temple ¹⁰ and groups serving the Muslim or other immigrant communities, on common good initiatives is crucial. Engaging with city programs focused on youth and community beautification ⁵⁶ and collaborating with nonprofits serving diverse populations ⁵⁸ can build trust and visibility.
- **New Congregations:** Riverdale presents significant potential for new churches due to the large unaffiliated population, but success requires culturally intelligent and contextually relevant models. Potential approaches include planting ethnically-focused congregations (e.g., targeting specific Asian or African immigrant groups), developing community-focused churches emphasizing service and relationship, or launching contemporary churches designed specifically for the unchurched/dechurched. Location within diverse neighborhoods and demonstrating tangible care are vital. Understanding the specific reasons behind the high rate of non-affiliation in Riverdale is critical for designing effective outreach.

VIII. Comparative Analysis

- **Purpose:** This section synthesizes the findings from the individual municipality profiles to provide a comparative perspective, highlighting key distinctions and commonalities that are crucial for developing a nuanced regional ministry strategy.
- **Demographics & Socioeconomics:** The five areas exhibit significant demographic and socioeconomic divergence.
 - **Affluence & Education:** South Fulton stands apart with its high median household income (\$81.8k), high educational attainment (38.9% Bachelor's+), and high homeownership (70%), representing an affluent, educated, predominantly Black suburban profile.¹³
 - **Economic Challenge & Youth:** College Park represents the other extreme,

with the lowest median income (\$48.5k), high poverty (20.6%), very low homeownership (22.1%), and a very young median age (31.3), indicating significant economic hardship concentrated among young renters.³⁴

- **Middle Ground & Diversity:** Riverdale (\$62.6k income, 12% poverty, 52.5% ownership, 19.1% Bachelor's+) and the Red Oak area proxy (ZIP 30349: \$63k income, 13.1% poverty, 32% Bachelor's+) occupy a middle ground economically, representing more traditional working-class/middle-class profiles with mixed housing tenure.⁴⁹ Riverdale is notable for its Asian and foreign-born populations.⁴⁹ East Point (\$59k income, 23.2% poverty, 43.7% ownership) combines moderate income with high poverty and high educational attainment (36.2% Bachelor's+), suggesting a complex mix of residents including potentially underemployed graduates and those facing economic distress.²⁶ * **Race & Ethnicity:** While all areas are predominantly Black/African American, the degree varies (from ~76% in East Point to ~91% in South Fulton). East Point has sizable White and Hispanic populations.²⁶

Riverdale has a significant Asian population.⁴⁹ South Fulton and Red Oak are the most racially homogeneous among the group.¹³ * **Religious Landscape:** A major differentiator is the county context influencing religious affiliation. * **Fulton County Areas (South Fulton, East Point, College Park-Fulton, Red Oak):** These areas likely reflect Fulton County's higher overall religious adherence (~67%) and an estimated unaffiliated rate of ~33%.

The landscape is diverse, including strong Black Protestant, Catholic, Methodist, and Non-denominational presence, plus significant Muslim and Jewish communities county-wide.⁴ * **Clayton County Areas (Riverdale, College Park-Clayton):** These areas reflect Clayton County's much lower religious adherence (~46%) and consequently a very high estimated unaffiliated rate (~54%). While Non-denominational and Baptist groups are large, Clayton County also has major Hindu and Muslim populations, with Riverdale hosting a prominent Hindu temple.⁹ This points to a significantly larger unchurched population and greater non-Christian religious diversity in Riverdale and parts of College Park. * **School Quality:** School ratings appear mixed across most areas, with notable variability even within the same city or school district. Highly-rated charter and magnet schools are present, particularly accessible to East Point and College Park residents, suggesting parental demand for alternatives.¹⁸ Riverdale's local schools generally show lower ratings.⁵³ The overall strength of Fulton County Schools¹⁶ benefits

South Fulton, East Point, Red Oak, and parts of College Park, while Clayton County Public Schools serves Riverdale and other parts of College Park.⁸ *

****Strategic Implications Summary:**** The comparison underscores the need for tailored strategies: * **South Fulton:** Engage affluent, educated professionals and families; focus on quality, intellectual depth, and community building. * **East Point:** Employ diverse approaches for a mixed-income, racially diverse population; address economic needs and social concerns alongside spiritual ones. * **College Park:** Prioritize ministry to young renters facing economic hardship; focus on practical needs, community connection, and accessible models. * **Red Oak:** Connect with working/middle-class families; emphasize community, family support, and practical faith. * **Riverdale:** Navigate high religious and ethnic diversity; prioritize cross-cultural engagement, address needs of immigrants, and develop specific strategies for the large unaffiliated and non-Christian populations.

IX. Future Projections (2025-2035)

- **Purpose:** Anticipating demographic and social shifts over the next decade is crucial for developing sustainable, long-term ministry strategies that remain relevant to the evolving needs of these South Metro communities.
- **Population Growth Projections:** The Atlanta region is projected to experience significant growth in the coming decades. The Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC) forecasts the 21-county region will add 1.8 million people by 2050, reaching a total population of 7.9 million.⁵⁹ Fulton County is expected to absorb a large share of this growth, projected to add over 254,000 residents by 2050.⁵⁹ Clayton County's growth is projected to be slower but still substantial, adding approximately 50,000 residents by 2050.¹² While specific 2035 projections for each city are not readily available in the provided materials, the overall trend indicates continued population pressure, particularly in the Fulton County municipalities (South Fulton, East Point, College Park, Red Oak). This growth will likely increase population density, strain infrastructure, and potentially exacerbate existing challenges like housing affordability. The Georgia Governor's Office of Planning and Budget (OPB) provides detailed county-level projections by age, race, and sex through 2060, which could offer more granular insights if accessed directly.⁶⁰

- **Demographic Shifts:**
 - **Aging Population:** A major regional and statewide trend is the rapid aging of the population. As the Baby Boomer generation fully enters retirement years and lifespans increase, the proportion of older adults will rise significantly. ARC forecasts that residents aged 75 and over will grow from 5% of the region's population in 2020 to 12% by 2050.⁵⁹ Statewide projections show the population over 60 reaching 25% by 2030 and 30% by 2040.⁷ This demographic shift will impact all five communities, increasing the demand for senior services, healthcare, accessible housing, and ministries tailored to older adults, regardless of a community's current median age.
 - **Increasing Diversity:** Georgia's younger generations are significantly more racially and ethnically diverse than older cohorts, indicating that the state's overall diversity will continue to increase.⁶² This trend will likely be amplified in the South Metro area, driven by both domestic migration and international immigration, which is a key component of Atlanta's growth.⁶³ Expect continued growth in Hispanic, Asian, and other minority populations across all five municipalities, particularly impacting areas like East Point and Riverdale that already exhibit higher diversity levels. This necessitates ongoing development of cross-cultural competencies within community institutions.
 - **Socioeconomic Trends & Gentrification:** Continued population growth and development initiatives, such as the Six West project in College Park⁴², are likely to fuel ongoing socioeconomic shifts. While development can bring new amenities and economic activity, it often leads to rising housing costs (already observed in College Park property values³⁴) and gentrification pressures. This dynamic could displace lower-income residents, particularly renters in areas like College Park and East Point, while potentially attracting more affluent populations.²⁹ Economic resilience, workforce development, and equitable access to opportunities will remain critical issues.²⁹
- **Implications for Church Leadership (2035 Horizon):** Looking towards 2035, church leadership should proactively plan for:
 - **Expanding Senior Adult Ministry:** Developing robust programs, support systems, and potentially partnerships to serve the rapidly growing 65+ and 75+ populations will be essential.

- **Deepening Cross-Cultural Engagement:** Investing in training, resources, and leadership development to effectively minister within an increasingly diverse ethnic and cultural landscape is non-negotiable. This may include launching multilingual services or culturally specific small groups.
- **Addressing Growth Impacts:** Engaging with community discussions around development, housing affordability, and potential displacement is crucial. Churches can play a role in advocating for equitable development and supporting residents negatively impacted by gentrification.
- **Strategic Church Planting:** Growth patterns should inform decisions about where new congregations might be needed and what types of communities are emerging. Areas experiencing rapid growth or significant demographic shifts may present prime opportunities.
- **Sustained Focus on the Unaffiliated:** The large unaffiliated population is unlikely to shrink significantly without intentional effort. Long-term strategies focused on building relationships, demonstrating relevance, meeting needs, and potentially utilizing non-traditional ministry models will be required.

X. Overall Strategic Recommendations

- **Purpose:** This section synthesizes the detailed analysis into overarching strategic recommendations for church leadership considering ministry engagement and expansion in South Fulton, East Point, College Park, Red Oak, and Riverdale.
- **Adopt a Portfolio Approach:** Recognize the significant diversity across these five communities. Avoid a one-size-fits-all strategy. Develop a portfolio of ministry approaches tailored to the distinct demographic, socioeconomic, and religious contexts of each area – from engaging affluent professionals in South Fulton to addressing poverty and transience in College Park, and navigating high diversity in Riverdale.
- **Prioritize Reaching the Unaffiliated:** The data consistently reveals large populations, particularly in Clayton County (Riverdale, parts of College Park) but also substantially in Fulton County areas, who are not connected to existing religious institutions.⁴ This group should be a primary focus. Success requires moving beyond traditional attractional models to employ relational, community-focused, and potentially non-traditional methods. Invest in understanding the specific reasons for non-affiliation within each local context

through localized surveys, listening sessions, or ethnographic research.

- **Develop Cross-Cultural Competency:** The increasing diversity of the region, especially evident in East Point and Riverdale (with significant Hispanic, Asian, and foreign-born populations ²⁶), necessitates a deep commitment to cross-cultural ministry. This includes training for staff and volunteers, developing culturally relevant programming, potentially offering multilingual services, and actively building relationships across ethnic and cultural lines. Respectful engagement with non-Christian religious communities (Hindu, Muslim) present in the area is also vital.⁹
- **Integrate Social Engagement:** Address the tangible needs and social concerns prevalent in these communities as an integral part of ministry. Issues like poverty, housing affordability, educational disparities, workforce development, and equitable development are not peripheral but central to the lived experiences of many residents.²⁹ Engaging these issues through service, partnership, and advocacy demonstrates relevance and care, building bridges particularly with unaffiliated populations.
- **Invest in Contextual Leadership:** Equip leaders (pastoral and lay) with the skills needed for ministry in complex, diverse, urban/suburban settings. This includes theological depth, cross-cultural intelligence, community analysis skills, and the ability to lead adaptive change.
- **Strategic Partnerships:** Leverage partnerships to maximize impact and reach. Collaborate with schools, local government entities, non-profits, community associations, and potentially other faith-based organizations (including interfaith efforts on shared goals) to address community needs and build trust.²⁹
- **Future-Oriented Planning:** Incorporate demographic projections (aging population, continued diversification, growth pressures) into long-range planning for staffing, facilities, ministry development, and church planting efforts to ensure sustainability and continued relevance through 2035 and beyond.⁵⁹
- **Ongoing Monitoring and Adaptation:** Regularly revisit demographic data, community surveys, and feedback to monitor trends and adapt strategies accordingly. The social landscape is dynamic, and effective ministry requires ongoing learning and flexibility.

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