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# What Barna's New Data Says About the Perception of Church

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Barna recently hosted a “State of the Church” event aimed at helping church leaders in specific cities understand what people think of the church in general.

One of the key questions they asked was the question of perception. In this instance, the data from these cities tracked closely with national averages.

Across the nation, a large percentage of unchurched people have negative views of the church, thinking that local churches are judgmental, hypocritical, irrelevant, disconnected from real issues in the community, and known more for what they are against.

The goal here isn't to have culture agree with everything we do as churches. The very nature of ministry means there will be those who disagree with our beliefs and question our methods. But where incorrect perception can be a stumbling block, leaders seeking to be good stewards should work to overcome them.

I want to share a snapshot of Barna's findings but also attach some recommended action steps to each fact.

My hope is that by shining a light on the data and highlighting one potential action step, you can move from information to application to transformation.

Whenever we talk about stats and trends, our goal is to help you take a step from “that’s interesting” to “that’s actionable.”

The stats are informative, and they should give you insights into your local ministry context. But more than that, they should inspire action.

***Stat: 41% say the church is known for the things they are against***

You may have heard this before, and this perception is hard to fight. The fact is your church is lumped in with other churches to create a macro-perception that may not be fair.

Still, when the unchurched believe the church to be against them, they will struggle to see themselves as a participant.

***Action Step: Use your social media channels to spotlight local organizations and businesses.***

One simple thing you can do is to use your platform to spotlight others. This may include other people, but you could also spotlight other organizations, non-profits, and businesses. Use your real estate to show that you’re for others, not just for yourself.

There are few that do this better than Gwinnett Church with their #ForGwinnett campaign. It began as a capital campaign but has expanded to a movement, spreading to churches and communities around the world. It’s messaging that sounds like this:

*“For far too long, the church has been known for what it is against. We want to be known for what we are for. We are FOR Gwinnett.”*

This approach extends to [merchandise](#), sermon series content, and as mentioned above, extensive use of social media campaigns to spotlight local organizations.

***Stat: 30% think the church is irrelevant to their lives***

When unchurched people think about church, they often don't make a connection to their daily lives. People are struggling with issues and they don't think the church addresses them. Church is for faith stuff, not work, school, money, mental health, and a host of other real-world issues. People in your community are asking questions they are not sure if your church is really answering them.

***Action Step: Create non-Sunday content that is helpful to people's daily struggles.***

Hopefully, your sermon planning and delivery speak to the needs of the people. But you can do so much more. Churches should be experts at creating and sharing "non-Sunday content" that reaches people where they are.

If your church is trying to reach parents of elementary children, you don't have to limit your content creation to Sunday morning kid's environments or sermons. Why not create and distribute resources helpful to parents all throughout the week?

If your church is trying to help people battle consumerism or have a more healthy approach to money, why not create tools and content you can share throughout the week that have the chance to reach people at home or at work?

What if you published short videos answering questions like who is Jesus, why the Bible matters, or how to let go of anger?

What if you created resources to help parents connect with their kids or have fun together throughout the summer?

What if you talked about vocation, life's purpose, burnout, or anxiety in short, sharable formats?

Don't have to limit your influence to Sunday morning. When you enter conversations throughout the week with a content strategy designed to build trust, you'll increase your perceived relevance.

A tool like [FrontDoor](#) could make this easier. Choose unbranded, helpful content from the Content Library, set it up on a landing page with a few clicks so you can give it away, and use automated follow-up tools to invite people to take a next step.

It's like a content-marketing system for churches, a way to use helpful resources to build trust and nurture those who aren't yet ready to plan a visit.

[Learn more about FrontDoor here.](#)

### ***Stat: 23% say the church is detached from the real issues in the community***

At first, this feels similar to the relevance stat, but there's some additional nuance worth unpacking.

As people are more and more connected to their communities, the more they will disconnect from organizations that don't feel like they fit. Think about local restaurants, boutiques, and events that fit nicely with the ethos of a community. They are a part of what's going on. When you're part of a community, you also are connected to the needs. Those who aren't dialed in could be perceived to be irrelevant and unaware.

***Action Step: Get involved in local community organizations so you can better understand the real issues in the community.***

What if you had a significant presence in the Rotary Club or the Chamber of Commerce or a local school council? What if every staff member or key leader got involved with a local organization? Demographic reports and impact studies are a great way to be introduced to needs, but there's no substitute for up-close involvement in the community. Getting involved personally, not just organizationally is a way to truly understand the needs of a community.