



Rediscovering Knoxville in Light of God's Mission

A snapshot of Knox County and Knoxville facts and figures
for small groups or planning teams
looking through a demographic and religious lens

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Feb. 2009

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Demographics

Knox County Population

Studying populations of people can be a tedious but essential task for those who want to better understand their community and contribute to its well-being. A population means people. And where there are people, there will be populations with incredible capacities for much good. At the same time, these same populations will yield corruption, injustice, and rebellion. This is simply how the story of humanity plays out. With this perspective, numbers and statistics take on a whole new meaning. In reality, numbers of people mean various levels of complexity. The larger the city, the more complex the issues — particularly in our present situation, where cities have become more global, more multicultural, and more urban.

In Knoxville's case, there are many population-related realities that have affected the city. Over the years, the city's center has lost a significant number of people, though the Central City sector continues to be the most densely populated area in the Knoxville region. As recent as 1960, Knoxville's central corridor had close to 80,000 residents, but in less than 40 years the population there had shrunk to less than 50,000 residents. 27% of Knoxville's white population relocated to other parts of the city and county.

At the same time, Knox County is and has experienced ongoing growth. Today, the county has well over 400,000 people. The Knoxville metropolitan area contains nearly 700,000 residents, and the Combined Statistical Area has surpassed one million.

Knoxville's growth is undoubtedly changing her cultural landscape. Sadly, the African American population has not grown the way that other populations have. At one time in Knoxville's rich history, the African American population made up more than 32% of the city's population. By 2005, African Americans made up only 17% of the city's population and less than 10% of the county.

It could be said that Knoxville’s racial composition is similar to and at the same time different from other cities in the Southeast. The realities of urban renewal, which contributed to the displacement of many African American families in the 20th century, cannot be ignored. Unlike other cities in the South, the city of Knoxville does not have a large – relatively speaking – African American population. While the African American population in Knoxville has declined numerically over the years, the Latin American population, has exploded in growth. The Latino population grew by at least 140% between 1980 and 2000. And, the Asian population continues to expand. Although Knoxville does not yet contain the ethnic diversity found within other cities in the South, it is catching up. Immigration and changes in the racial climate should challenge churches to re-think how they go about mission, so that the city will be a place where justice and mercy abounds, and populations — both old and new — will be included in reconciliatory and redemptive activity in every sector of the city.

Population snapshots

Knoxville’s “population” is...

| | |
|---|-----------|
| Knoxville (city) | 182,337 |
| Knox County | 423,874 |
| Knoxville Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) | 681,525 |
| Knoxville-Sevierville-La Follette Combined Statistical Area (CSA) | 1,029,155 |

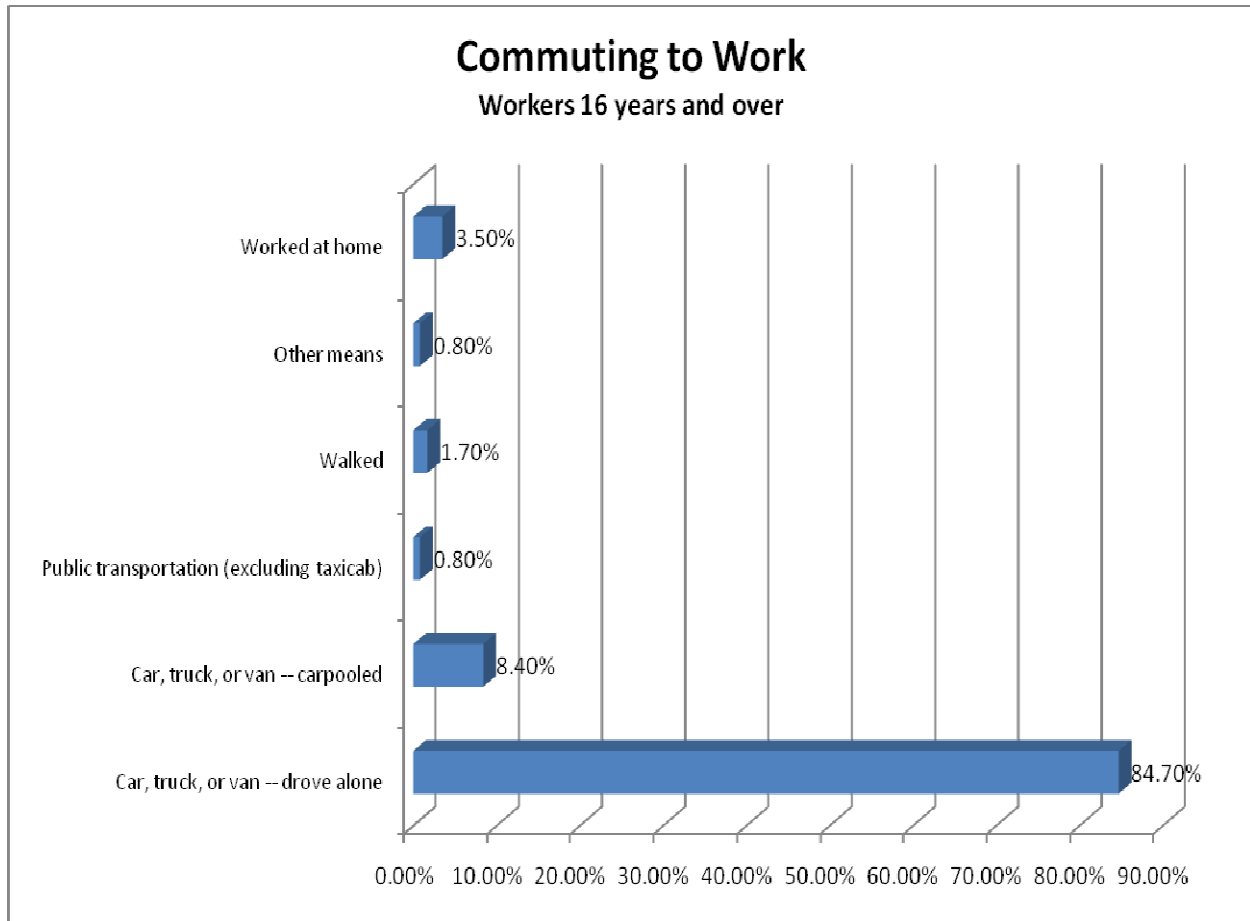
The Knoxville Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) is made up of 5 counties. They are Anderson County, Blount County, Knox County, Loudon County, and Union County. It is the third largest MSA in Tennessee and the 77th largest metropolitan statistical area of all MSA’s in the country.

The Knoxville-Sevierville-La Follette Combined Statistical Area (CSA) includes not only the above counties, but also Hamblen, Grainger, Jefferson, Sevier, La Follette, Roane, and Cocke counties. There are only 53 metropolitan areas in the United States with a CSA population larger than Knoxville’s.

The following are various estimates adapted from the U.S. Census Bureau and the 2005-2007 American Community Survey.

Knox County Commuters

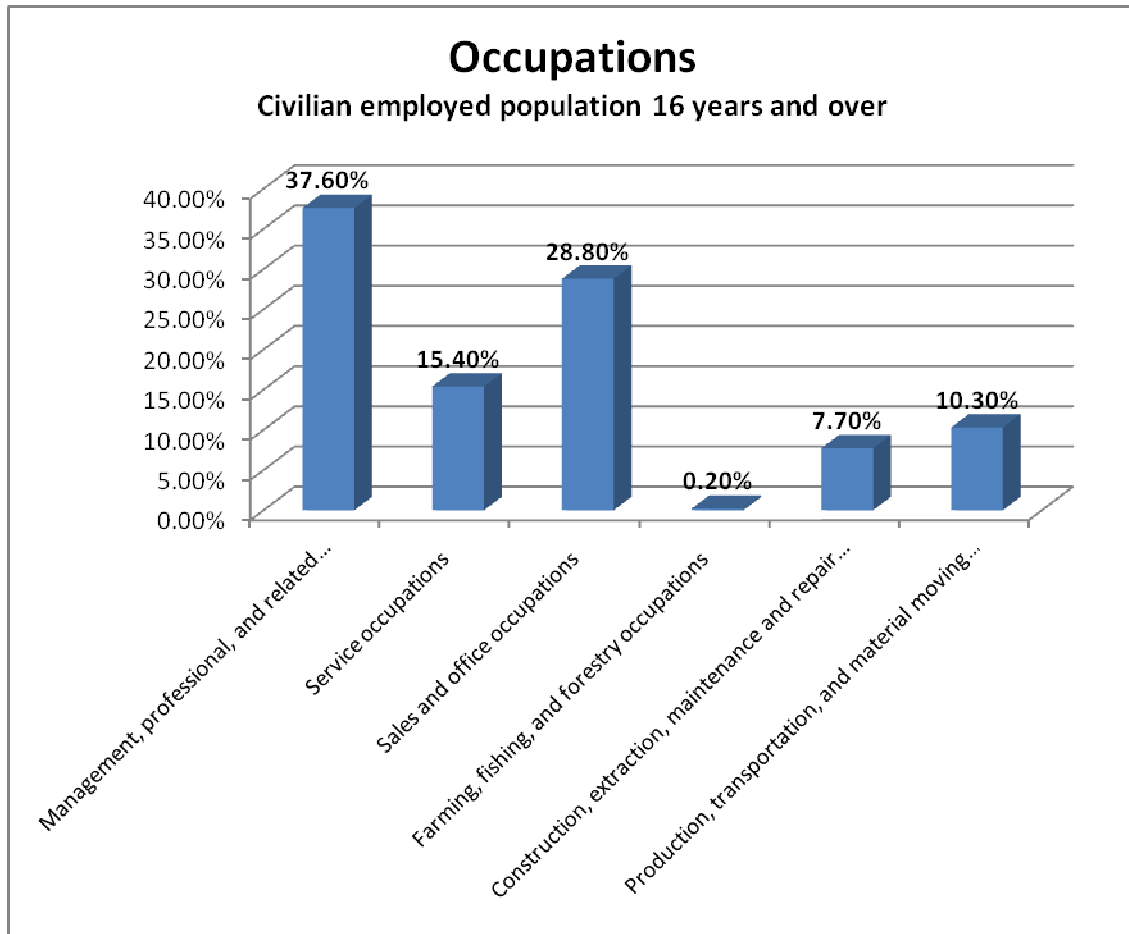
Knox County bears the marks of a car-driven culture, willing to commute to work over longer distances and times. In Knox County, the average commute time is roughly 21 minutes. The chart below gives a percentage breakdown of how Knox County's population gets to work.



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2005-2007 American Community Survey

Knox County Economy

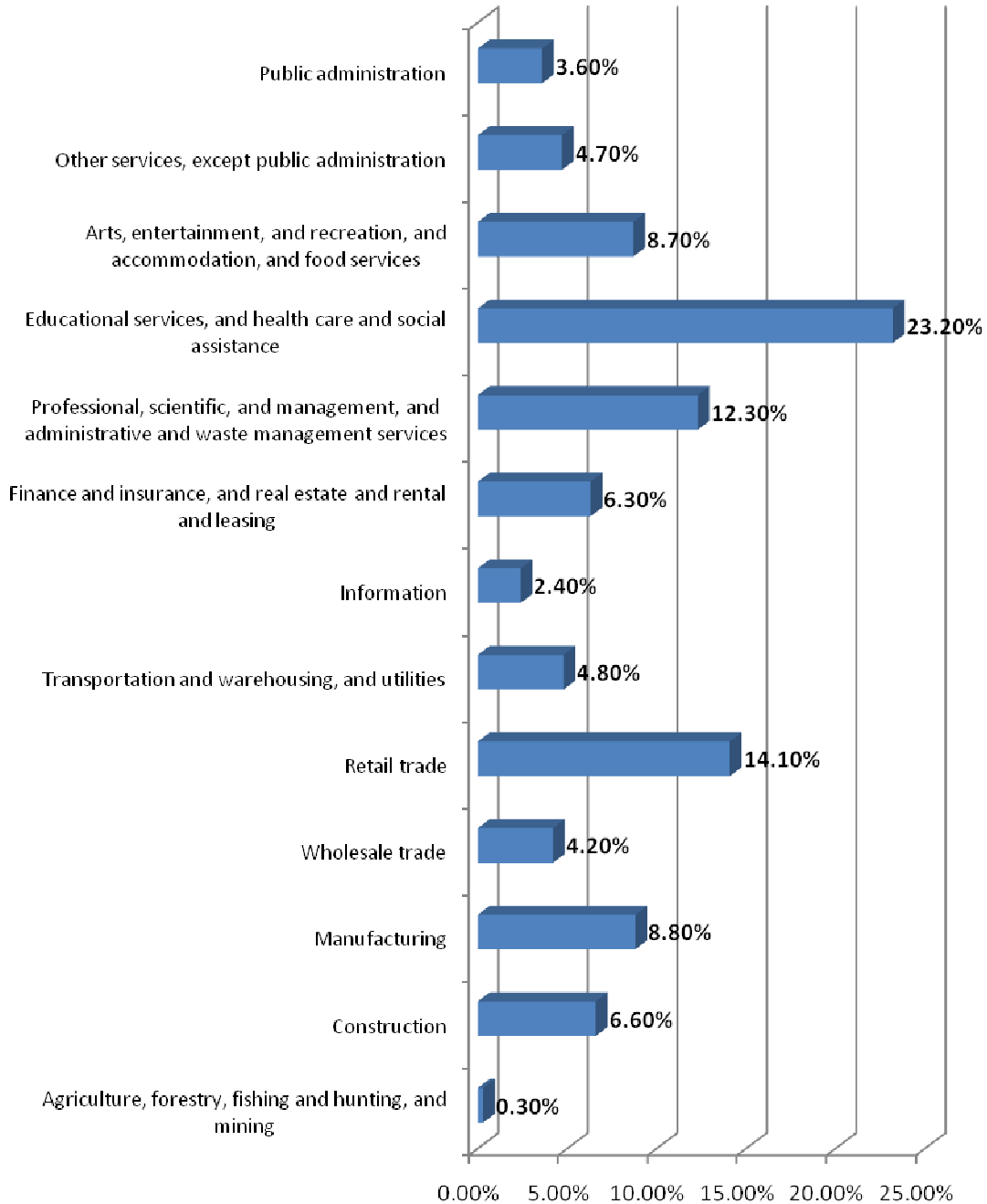
In what industries do the majority of Knox County's residents work?



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2005-2007 American Community Survey

Industry

Civilian employed population 16 years and over

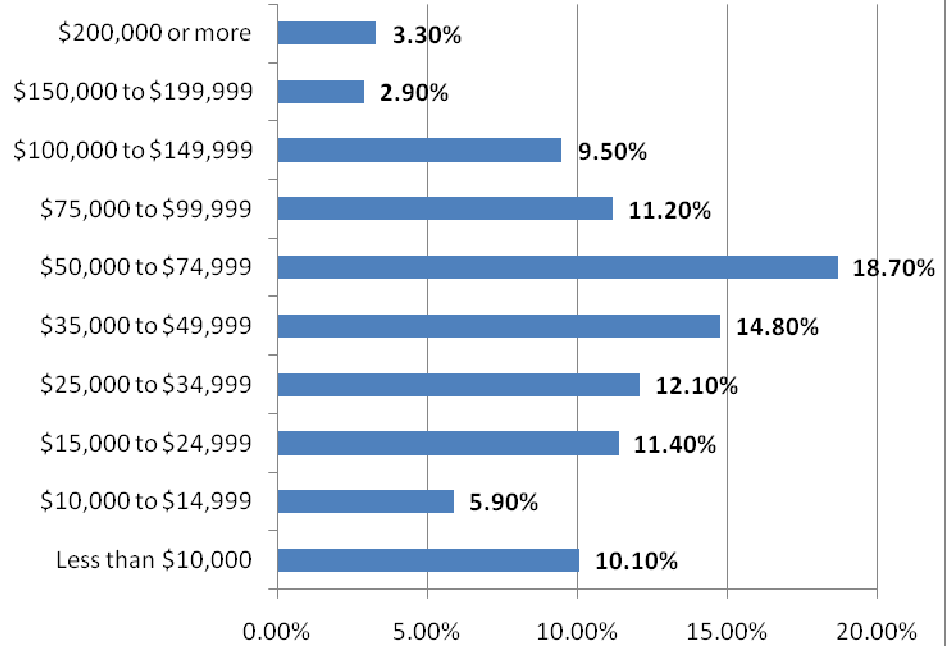


Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2005-2007 American Community Survey

INCOME AND BENEFITS
 (IN 2007 INFLATION-ADJUSTED DOLLARS)
 Total households

Median Household
 Income in Knox
 County: \$45,309

Mean Household
 Income in Knox
 County: \$61,511



Knox County Households with other earnings

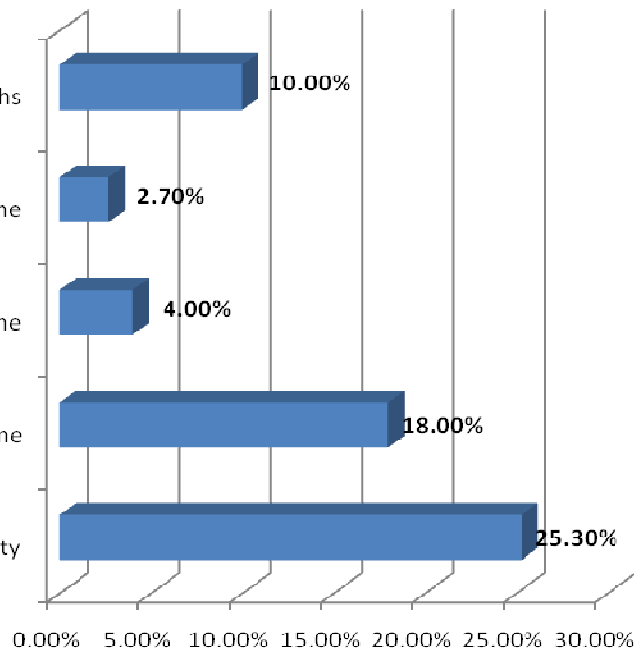
With Food Stamp benefits in the past 12 months

With cash public assistance income

With Supplemental Security Income

With retirement income

With Social Security



Percentage of families and people whose income fell below the poverty line in a 12-month period of time

All families: 9.5%

With related children under 18 years: 15.2%

With related children under 5 years only: 19.6%

Married couple families: 3.7%

With related children under 18 years: 5%

With related children under 5 years only: 7.7%

Families with female householder, no husband present: 33.5%

With related children under 18 years: 43.1%

With related children under 5 years only: 50.1%

Percentage of families and people whose income fell below the poverty line in a 12-month period of time

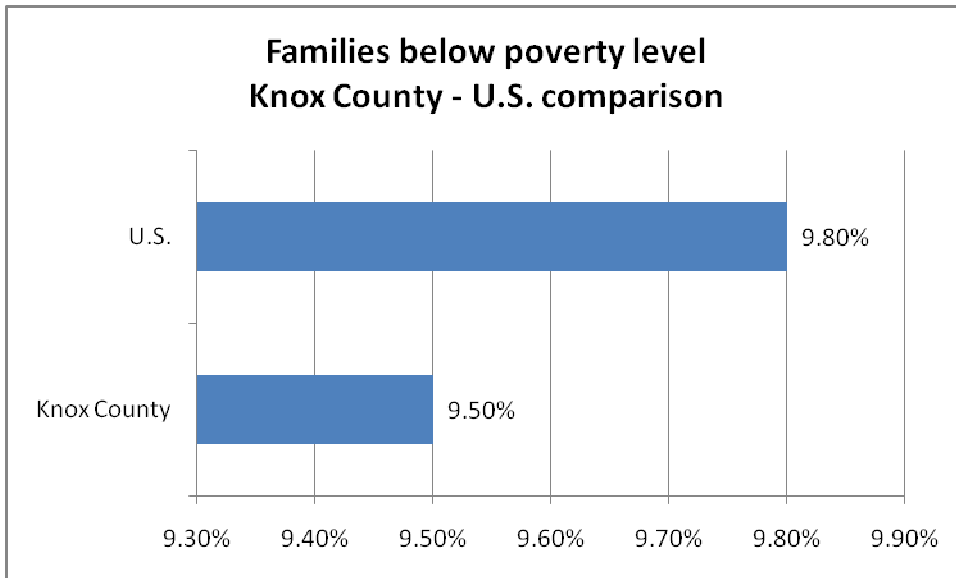
All people: 14%

Under 18 years: 16.8%

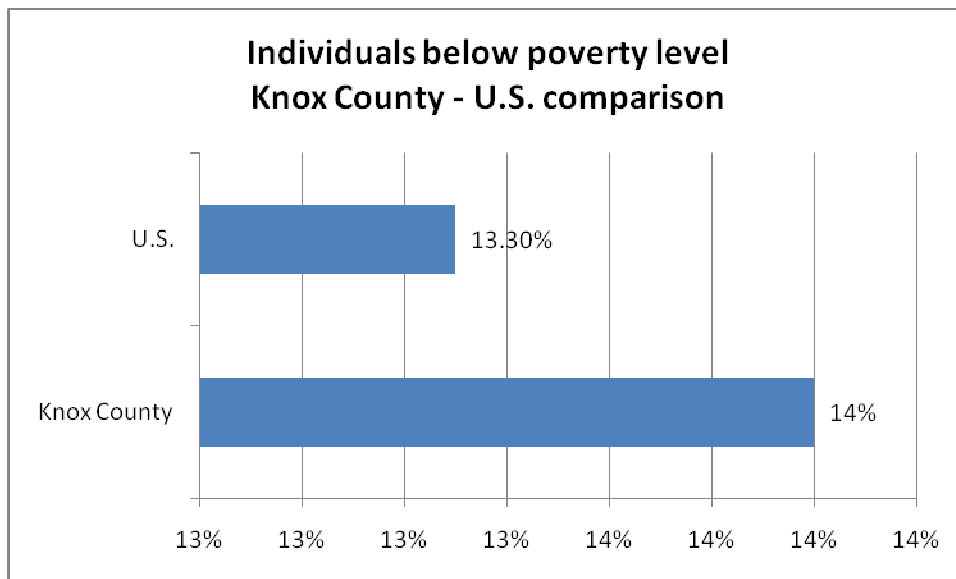
18 years and over: 13.2%

65 years and over: 10%

People in families: 9.9%

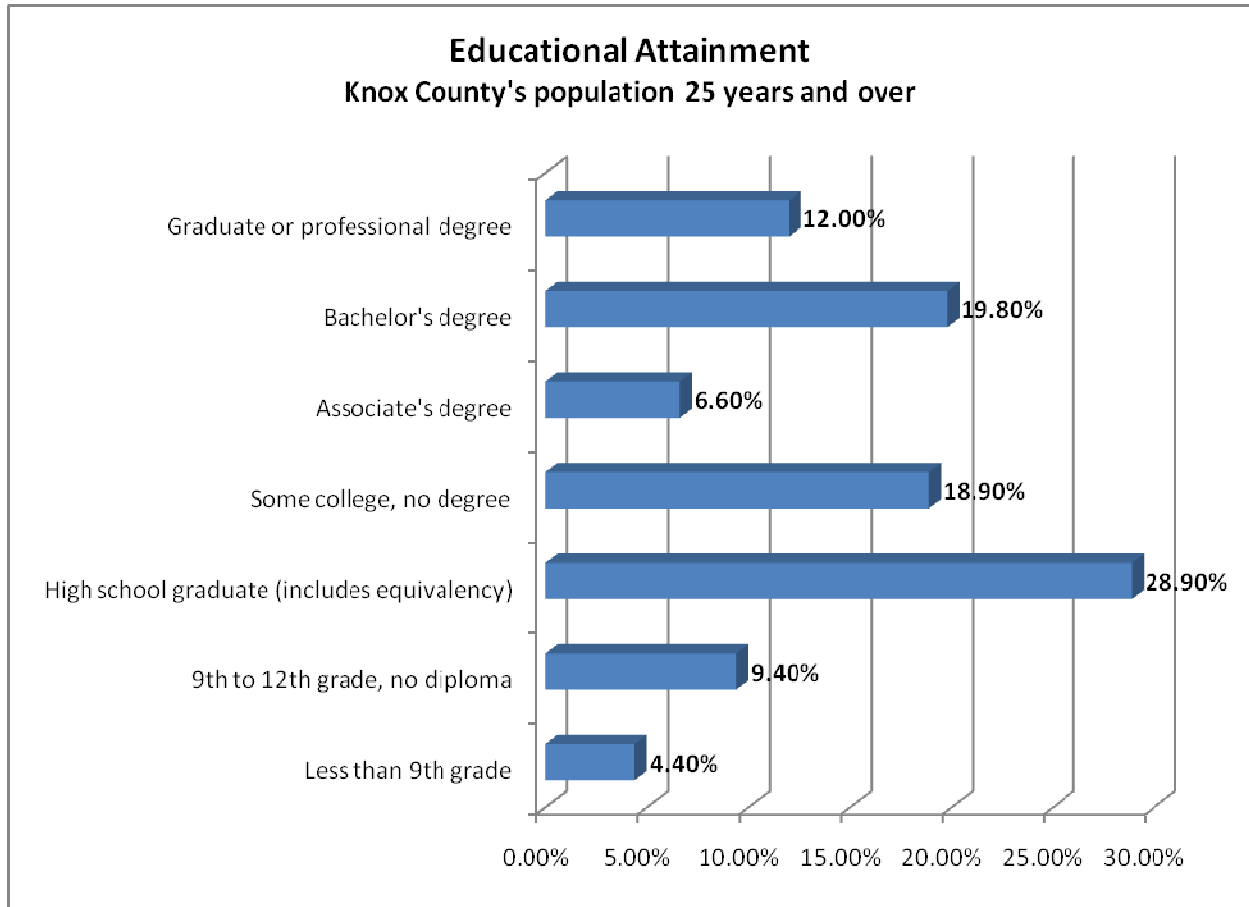


Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2005-2007 American Community Survey



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2005-2007 American Community Survey

Educational Attainment

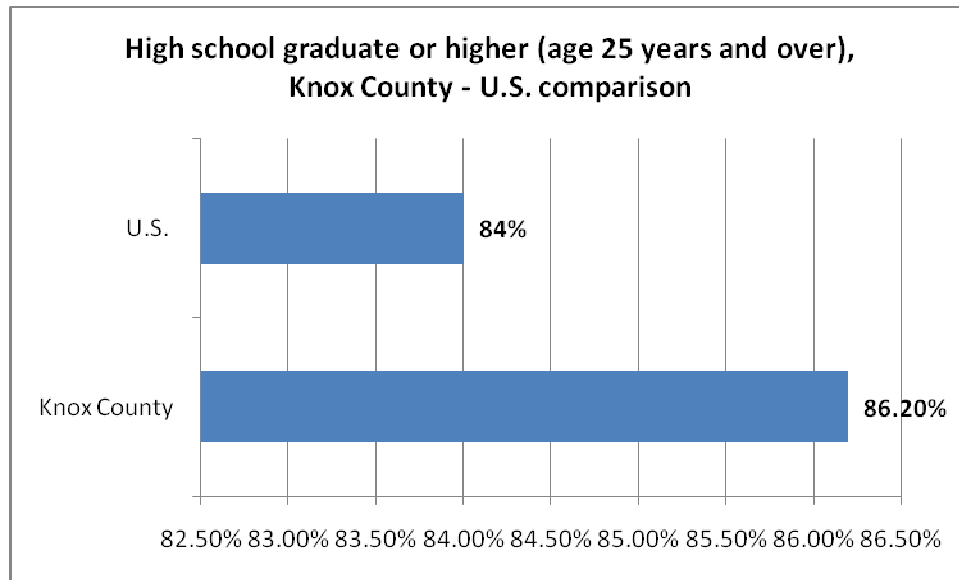


Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2005-2007 American Community Survey

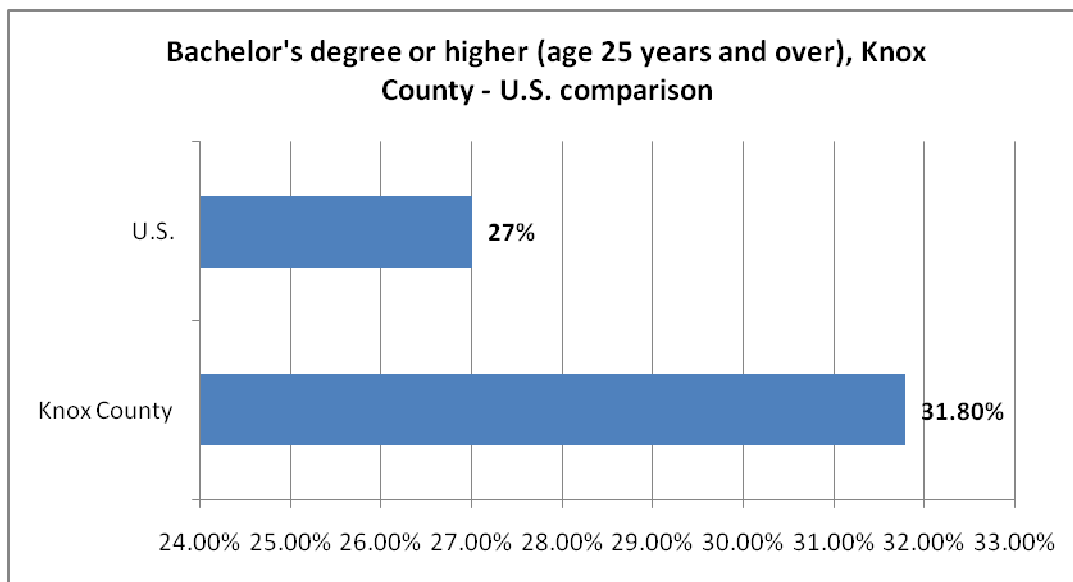
Percent high school graduate or higher, age 25 years and over: 86.2%

Percent bachelor's degree or higher, age 25 years and over: 31.8%

Knox County residents are slightly more educated than the rest of the United States...

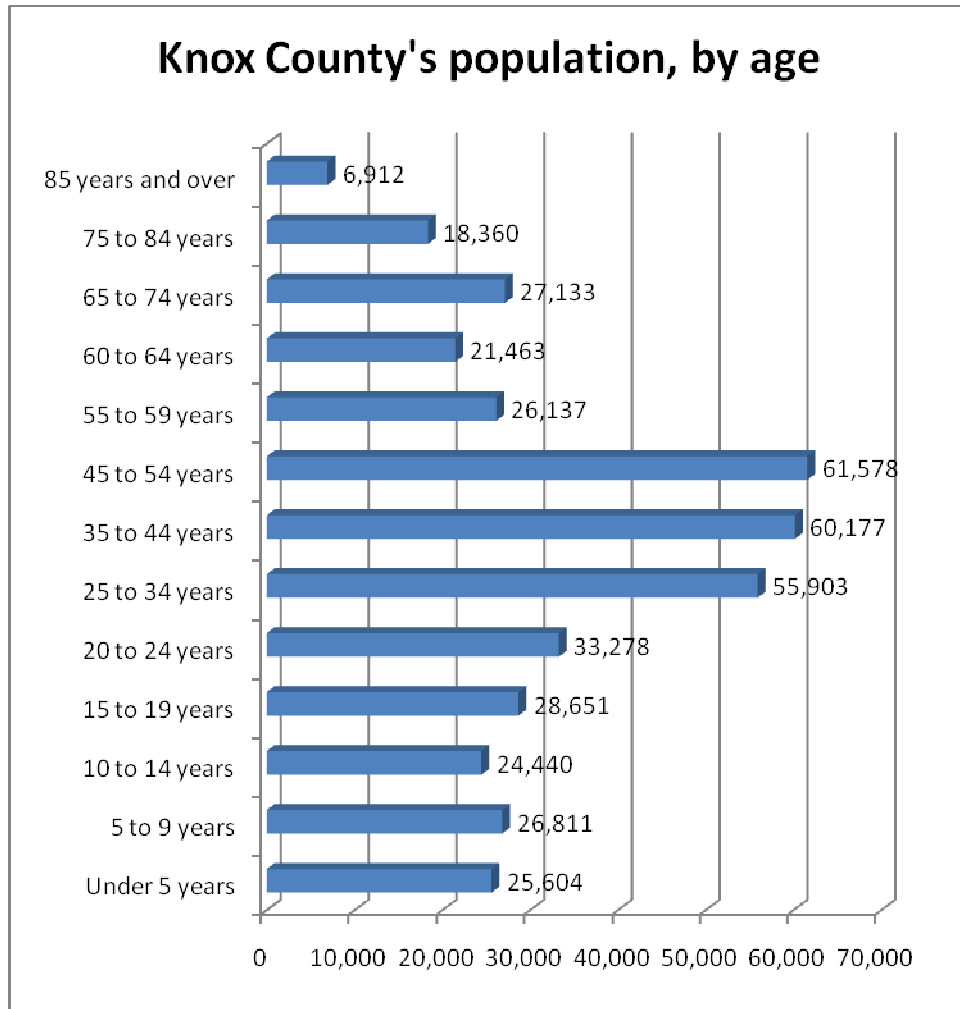


Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2005-2007 American Community Survey



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2005-2007 American Community Survey

Age



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2005-2007 American Community Survey

Median age: 37:3

Small Group Activities

1. As a group, become familiar with the data of your particular census tract or city/county sector and train your eyes and ears to be on the lookout for ways to interact with new residents moving to your community. Ask yourselves, “Is our census tract growing?” “Why or Why not?” “What is being done to welcome new residents or immigrants?”
2. Contact a small group or small group leader in a part of the city experiencing similar growth/decline as that of your census tract or community. Compare your stories. Ask the group or group leader what is being done in their context to connect with new populations, engaging them with the gospel. Contact your pastor or small group director to help coordinate this particular activity.
3. As a group, check out Knoxmpc.org. Using the census tract data that the Knoxville/Knox County Metropolitan Planning Commission provides free of charge, examine the data and compare your assumptions about your neighborhood with the statistics that are provided. The MPC provides a profile of every tract and every sector in Knoxville and Knox County. See how accurate or inaccurate your assumptions might be. What will you do with the information you now have?

Questions for Discussion

1. In what ways is Knoxville affected by urban growth, urbanization, and urbanism?
2. Do our small groups and church reflect an understanding of the various populations that make up our ministry context? If so, in what ways? If not, why not? What needs to be changed?
3. How can we take the data that is available to us through the Metropolitan Planning Commission, along with the findings from other studies that have been done on our community, and better engage our community with culturally appropriate (and biblically informed) ministry efforts?
4. How does “size” (of place) play into our efforts, as we consider reaching our community?

Resources for Small Groups and churches desiring to study Knoxville's population

Having census data (or population-related data) on hand can certainly aid in both the research of communities and design of pertinent strategies for bettering neighborhoods. Small groups and ministry leaders who desire to work with updated data concerning Knoxville's population can benefit from a couple of free resources, both of which publish much or all of their data online. The first of these two resources is the Knoxville – Knox County Metropolitan Planning Commission. The second is a study prepared by The University of Tennessee College of Social Work Office of Research and Public Service (also referred to as SWORPS). The study, updated in 2008 at the request of The United Way of Greater Knoxville, is divided into two components – a) "The Viewbook: Demographic Snapshots of Knox County" and b) "Knox County Demographic Profiles."

Here are the links -

Knoxville – Knox County Metropolitan Planning Commission: <http://www.knoxmpc.org/>

SWORPS Study:

a) Viewbook: Demographic Snapshots of Knox County:

<http://www.unitedwayknox.org/KnoxViewbook.pdf>

b) Knox County Demographic Profiles

http://www.unitedwayknox.org/1990-2000_2006_Knox%20Co.pdf

Ethnicity and Language

Ethnicity and Language

in

Knox County

It is crucial to gain a better picture of the racial, cultural, and linguistic differences in your city, if you, your church, or your small group is to seek the welfare and well-being of the city with integrity. To help us develop a better picture of Knox County, there are some charts included in this section. Ethnic statistics do not replace the hard work of digging into a neighborhood and discovering ways in which ethnocentrism and cultural bias raise their ugly heads, but they do at least provide a vantage point from which to view a snapshot of the city. And, statistics can act as a springboard from which to start a more in depth investigation of how your church can participate in the ways in which God is reconciling ethnic relationships and restoring fractured communities that have been divided by race.

Addressing the challenges of operating in diverse city contexts, the Lausanne Committee offers this perspective...

“Leaders at all levels must develop an informed view of how ethnic identity and racism operate in urban contexts. The new global city is comprised of cities within cities, defined by ethnicity and class. Every major city now contains some of the unreached peoples groups of the world. Urban leaders must understand a biblical theology of reconciliation and solidarity with the victims of class or racial hatred, as well as develop a mature commitment to anti-racism and a confronting of the systems that perpetuate this sin. The church must preach a holistic gospel in cities that overcomes racial division. The...church must stop perpetuating these divisions, and the (city) leader must be willing to help the church to reject silence or the status quo in these matters. There is a rich Biblical tradition into which the (city) minister can tap. In Acts 6 justice and reconciliation was achieved between Hellenistic widows and the new community. In Acts 15 at the Jerusalem Council, reconciliation with Gentile Christians was inculcated in Christian belief. Paul and Barnabas, who were Jews, were intentionally sent to the Gentile city of Antioch, where they had a transformational influence.”

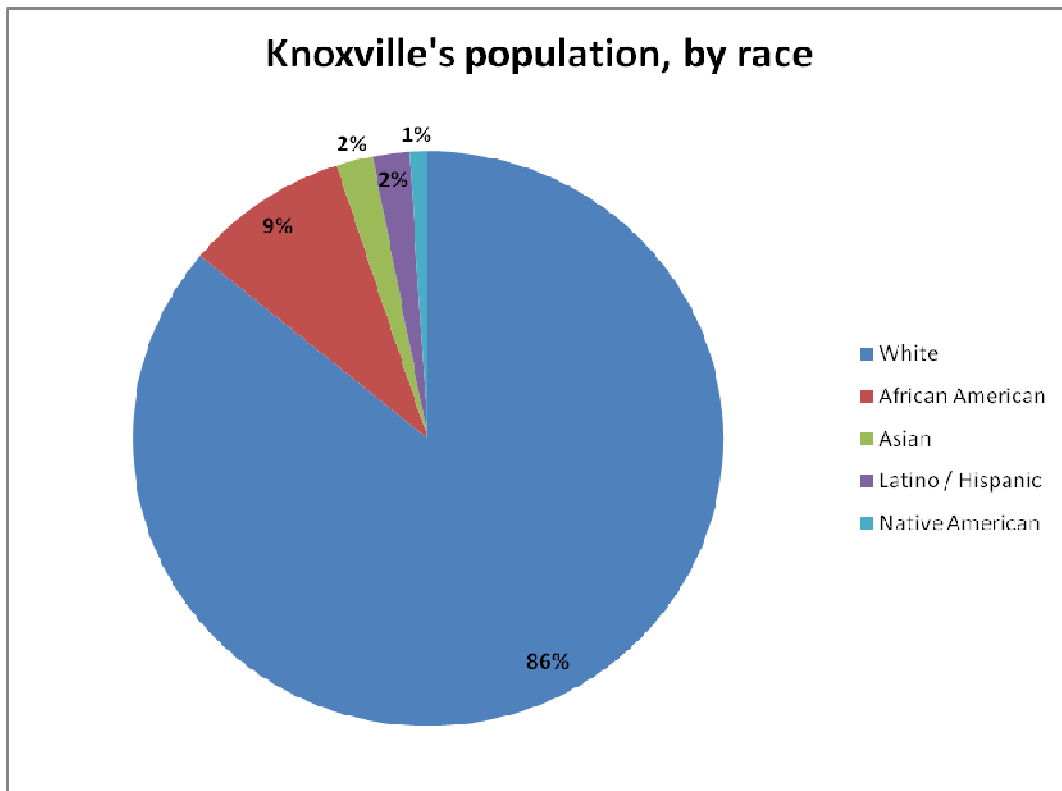
(source: http://www.lausanne.org/documents/2004forum/LOP37_IG8.pdf.)

Why should you, your small group, or your church become involved in the work of reconciliation? Of building relational bridges among people different from ourselves? From a foundational standpoint, as Christians, we are recipients of the peace that Jesus has accomplished for us — peace between people who were once alienated, separated by ethnocentrism and stereotypes regarding race and class. Consider the following words from Peter...

“For (Jesus) himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord.” Ephesians 2:14-21 (ESV)

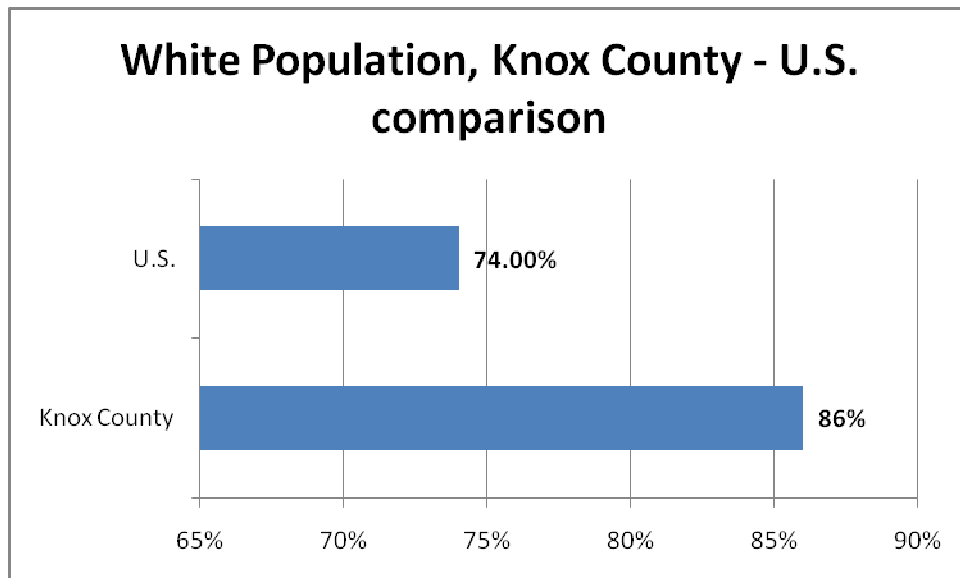
Through Jesus, God is reconciling people of different cultural backgrounds and different languages together. As God’s people in Knoxville, TN, our involvement with ethnically diverse populations, including those sojourning in this city from other world regions, helps us to keep this in perspective.

Before we suggest a few small group activities, let’s get a bird’s eye view of how Knox County breaks down, ethnically speaking.

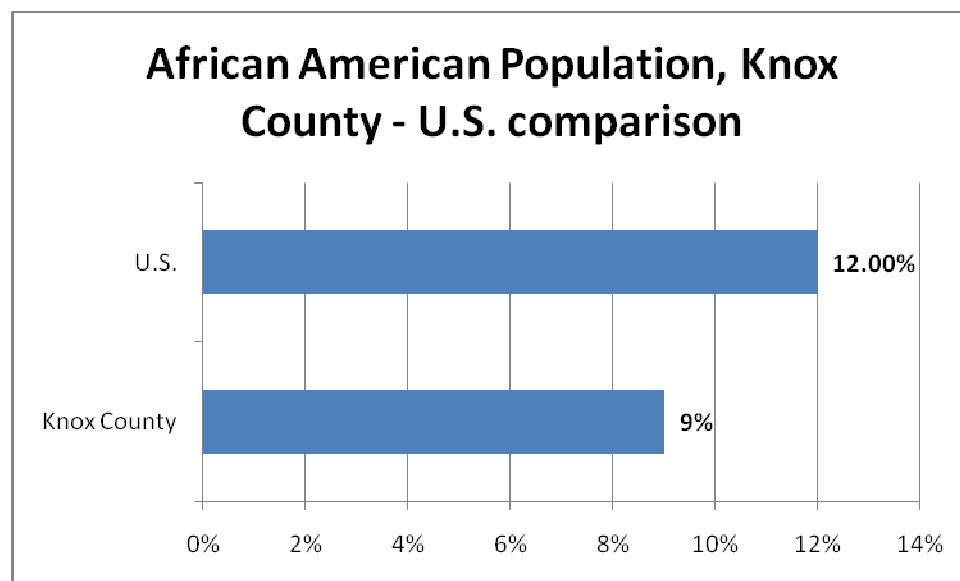


Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2005-2007 American Community Survey

Knox County's Ethnic Diversity

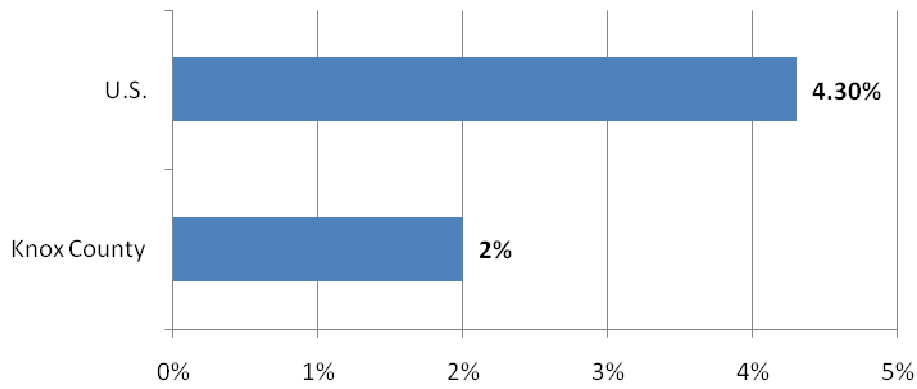


Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2005-2007 American Community Survey



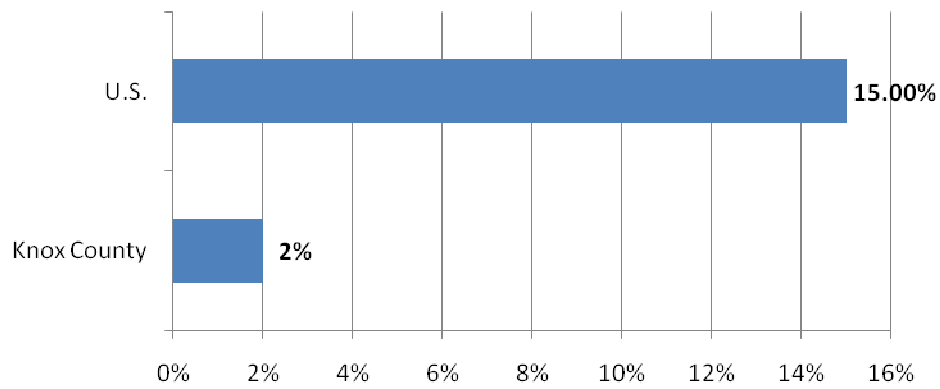
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2005-2007 American Community Survey

Asian Population, Knox County - U.S. comparison



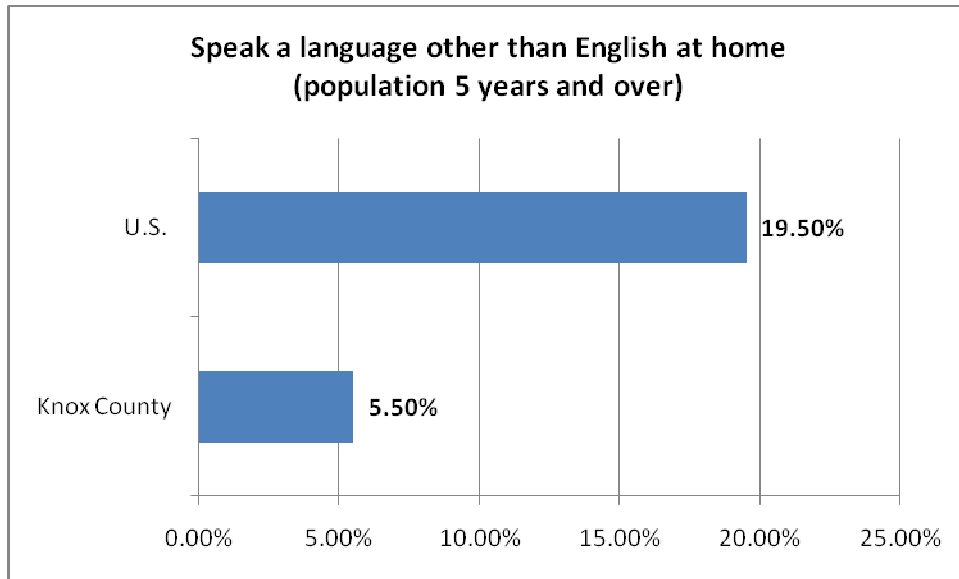
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2005-2007 American Community Survey

Latino / Hispanic Population, Knox County - U.S. comparison



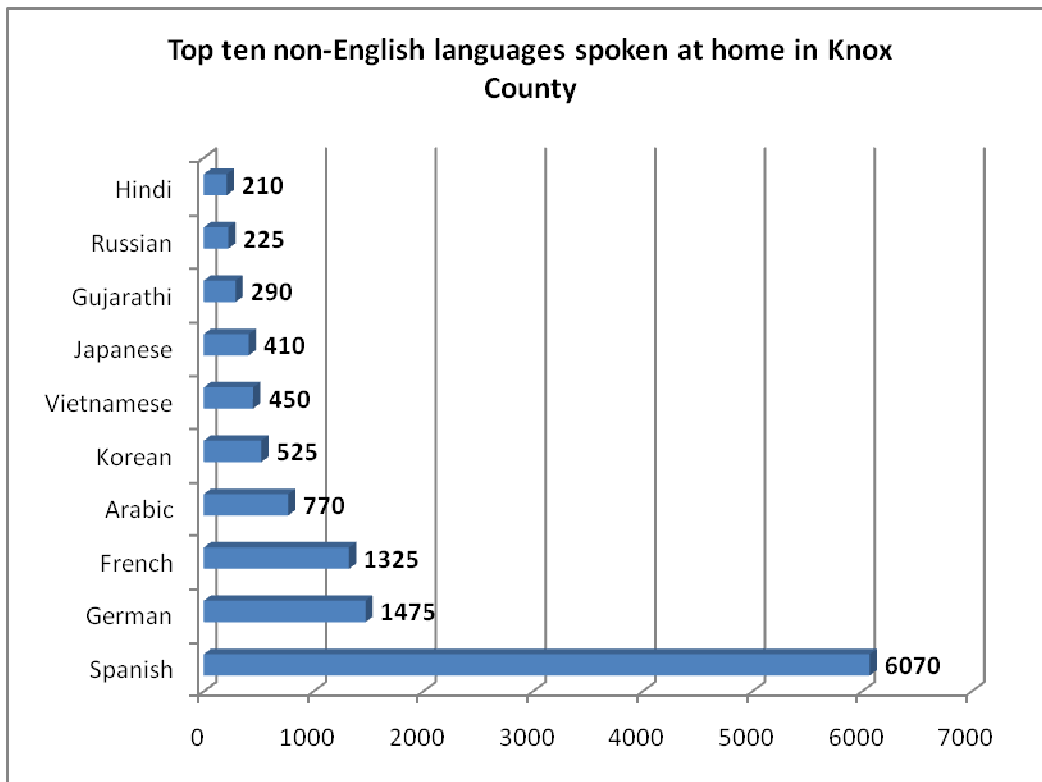
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2005-2007 American Community Survey

Knox County and language



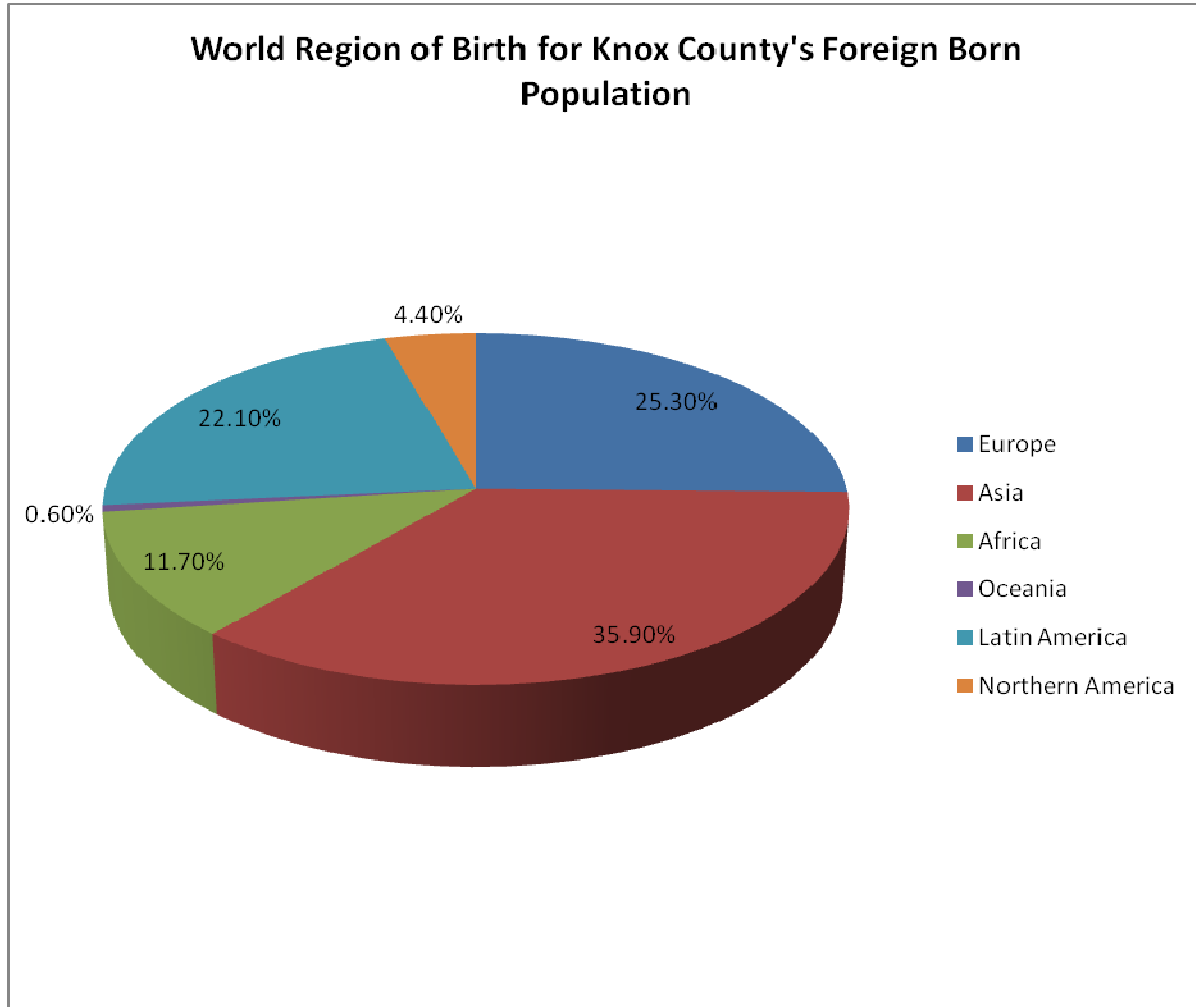
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2005-2007 American Community Survey

In 2000, the following languages were the 10 leading non-English languages spoken in Knox County homes. Spanish was the most spoken non-English language spoken at home.



Source: www.peoplegroups.info

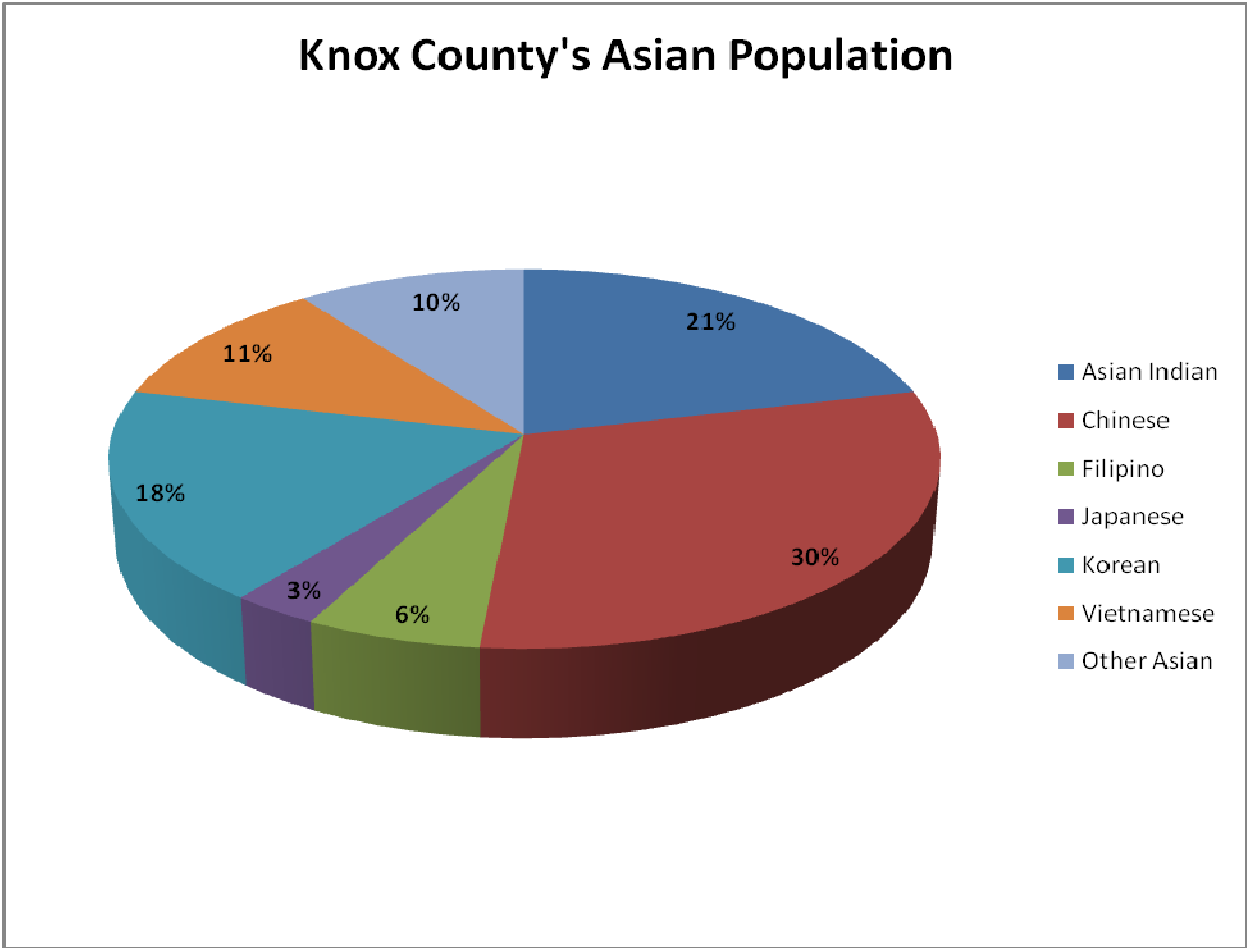
Knox County's Foreign Born Population



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2005-2007 American Community Survey

3.9% of Knox County's total population is foreign born (less than 17,000). The majority of Knox County's foreign born population is from Asia and Europe, followed by Latin America and Africa.

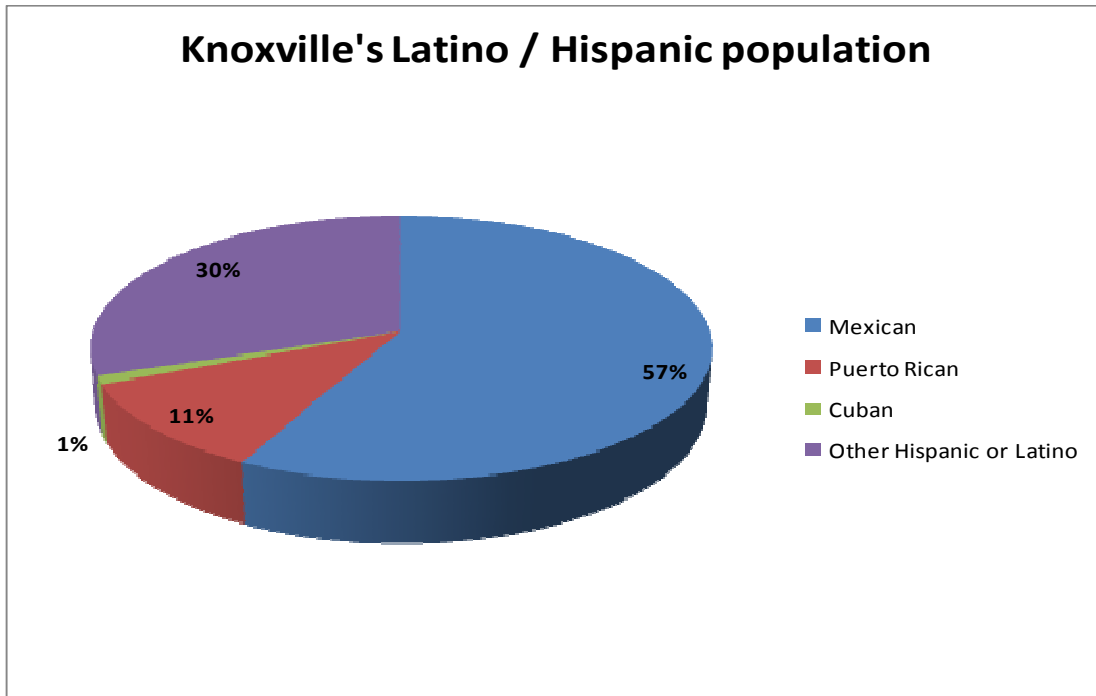
Knox County's Asian Population



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2005-2007 American Community Survey

More than 50% of Knox County's Asian population is Chinese or Asian Indian.

Knox County's Latino Population



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2005-2007 American Community Survey

The majority of Knox County's Latino population is Mexican. In the past, Latin American immigrants found larger metropolitan areas to be a haven for better labor opportunities. Times have changed. Today, many Latino immigrants often bypass large metropolitan city centers and move to lesser populated settings, including small cities and even rural areas. In Knox County, of the three sectors containing the largest populations of Latinos, two are in the county and only one (Central City Sector) is in the city.

Robert Hodge, director of El Puente in Knoxville, estimates that Latin Americans number 25,000 within a 50 mile radius of Knoxville, with approximately 8000 in Knox County.

Small Group Study/Activities

- The Bible provides a template for ministry among immigrants and refugees. Reflect on the following few references...

“You shall not wrong a sojourner or oppress him, for you were sojourners...” (Exodus 22:21 ESV)

“When a stranger sojourns with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers...” (Leviticus 19:33,34 ESV)

“Love the sojourner, therefore, for you were sojourners...” (Deuteronomy 10:19 ESV)

- Michael Pocock writes, “The history of humankind... bears constant record to the constant movement of peoples. When we consider the migration of people to (our context), we need to realize that it is part of God’s plan, even though many of the immigrants themselves may be unaware of it.” (Pocock and Henriques, 60-61) Keeping this in mind, God’s people in Knoxville may consider the fact that God has brought people from a variety of world regions in recent years. There are numerous opportunities for churches to come alongside these “sojourners,” in areas of advocacy and Christian hospitality, helping them to navigate the city and the culture. Check out the Bridge Refugee and Sponsorship services (<http://www.discoveret.org/refugees/>) in Knoxville to find out ways in which your group can develop relational bridges with Knoxville’s immigrant populations.

Questions for discussion

1. What does Ephesians 2 suggest regarding race / ethnicity?
2. From our vantage point, do we believe that Knoxville is a racially/ethnically diverse city? Why or why not? Do we seem to appreciate or loathe ethnic diversity? On what do we base our feelings?
3. Does our small group/church reflect the ethnic diversity that exists in our neighborhood or community? Why or Why not?
4. What does the Bible say about immigration (or “aliens,” “foreigners,” or “strangers”? Looking at our current situation, would we say that we have generally retreated from issues pertaining to justice and mercy (or advocacy), or have we embraced the challenges? What could we do differently?

Using population data

How can a small group or team use data from sources such as The Metropolitan Planning Commission (MPC) in Knoxville or the Viewbook? That depends on what the group is trying to do.

The Metropolitan Planning Commission (MPC) in Knoxville uses 12 planning sectors for Knoxville and Knox County — 6 county and 6 city. Each sector is divided by one or more census tracts that correspond to established neighborhoods and communities. Maps of these sectors and census tracts can be obtained through the MPC's website.

Profiles of General Demographic Characteristics can be downloaded for each of the 12 planning sectors and each of the census tracts for both the city and county by going to the MPC's website here: <http://www.knoxmpc.org/locldata/cenhome.htm/>. Each profile contains data on the following:

- Gender and Age
- Race
- Group Quarters
- Household by type
- Household occupancy
- Housing tenure
- School enrollment
- Educational attainment
- Marital status
- Disability status of the civilian noninstitutionalized population
- Residence (year)
- Nativity and place of birth
- Region of birth of foreign born
- Language spoken at home
- Employment status
- Commuting to Work
- Occupation
- Industry
- Class of worker
- Income
- Poverty status
- Housing units (structure, year built, year moved-into)
- Vehicles available
- House heating fuel
- Occupants per room
- Mortgage status and selected monthly owner costs
- Gross rent

For example, to see a profile of general demographic characteristics for the Central City planning sector, Knoxville's most densely populated sector containing 19 census tracts, go to <http://archive.knoxmpc.org/locldata/census00/cencity.pdf>. To see a profile of one of the census tracts found in that sector, check out the Central tract (tract 2): <http://archive.knoxmpc.org/locldata/census00/tract2.pdf>.

Websites that provide free demographic information for Knoxville...

www.City-data.com

www.Census.gov

www.Knoxmpc.org

www.Factfinder.census.gov

www.dataplace.org

www.zipskinny.com

The document called "Toward the Transformation of our Cities/Regions" can be downloaded here: http://www.lausanne.org/documents/2004forum/LOP37_IG8.pdf

Resources for further study and for understanding the dynamics of racial / ethnic issues in Knoxville...

Books

Mark Gornik. 2002. *To Live in Peace: Biblical Faith and Changing Inner City*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

Michael Pocock and Joseph Henriques. 2002. *Cultural Change and Your Church: Helping Your Church Thrive in a Diverse Society*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books.

Church and Religion

Church and Religion in Knox County

Knoxville is a city with many churches. In 2007, it was reported that Knox County contained 672 churches (www.referenceusa.com). Factoring in Anderson, Blount, Knox, Loudon, Sevier, and Union counties, the total number of churches was reportedly 1223. Is Knoxville to be considered a “churched” city with little need for more? Are some of these churches dying? What does it mean for Knoxville’s churches when conservative estimates suggest that 50% of Knoxvillians don’t go to church?

These are good questions, and ones that should be considered when taking into account the state of American churches in the 21st century. The Hartford Institute for Religion Research “estimates there are roughly 335,000 religious congregations in the United States. Of those, about 300,000 are Protestant and other Christian churches, and 22,000 are Catholic and Orthodox churches. Non-Christian religious congregations are estimated at about 12,000.”

That sounds like a large number, but consider what researchers at the North American Mission Board recently reported concerning the church-to-population ratio based on U.S. Census statistics (as recorded in *Planting Missional Churches*, by Ed Stetzer)...

In 1900, there were 28 churches for every 10,000 Americans.

In 1950, there were 17 churches for every 10,000 Americans.

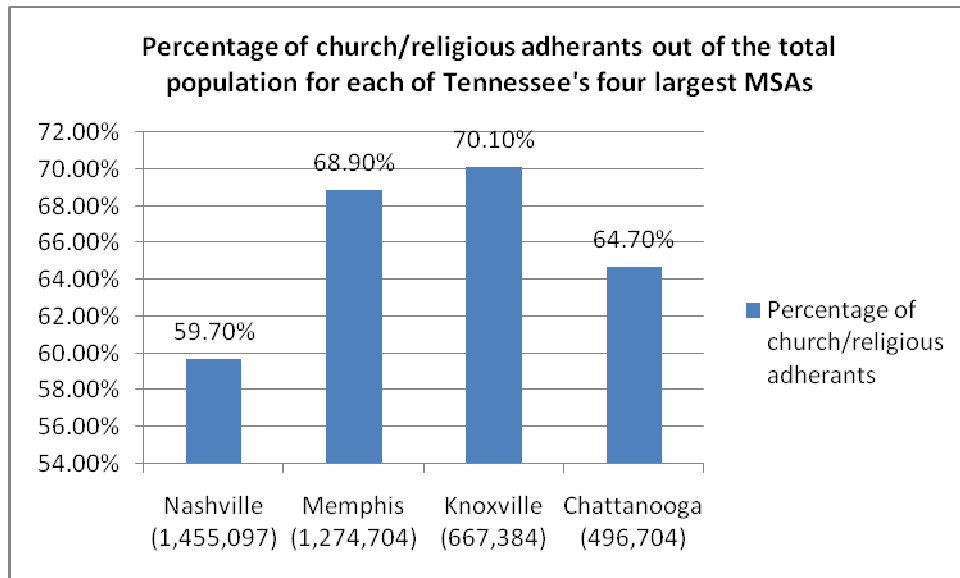
In 2000, there were 12 churches for every 10,000 Americans.

In 2004, the latest year available (at the time of publication), there (were) 11 churches for every 10,000 Americans. (Stetzer, 9)

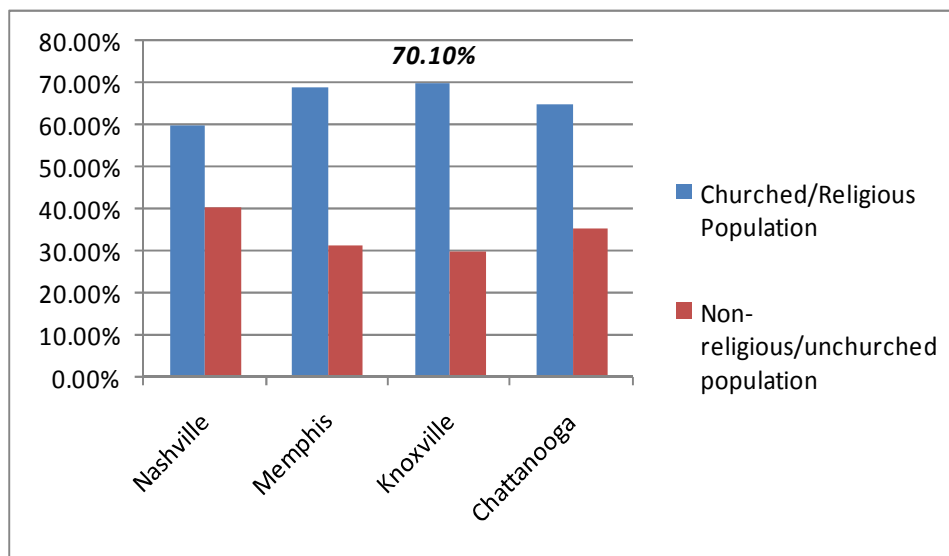
Numbers of churches in the United States are shrinking in proportion to the growing population. Of course, it is difficult to factor in the numbers of alternative expressions of “church” (i.e. house churches), but for the most part the gap is continuing to widen, and churches (and the Christians who make up these churches) are beginning to find themselves moving toward the margins of the culture and the population.

So, what is the current picture of churches in Knoxville? This section will take a brief look at this question.

Of Tennessee’s four largest Metropolitan Statistical Areas, Knoxville’s population has the greatest percentage of church/religious adherents, and the lowest number of unchurched / non-religious people.

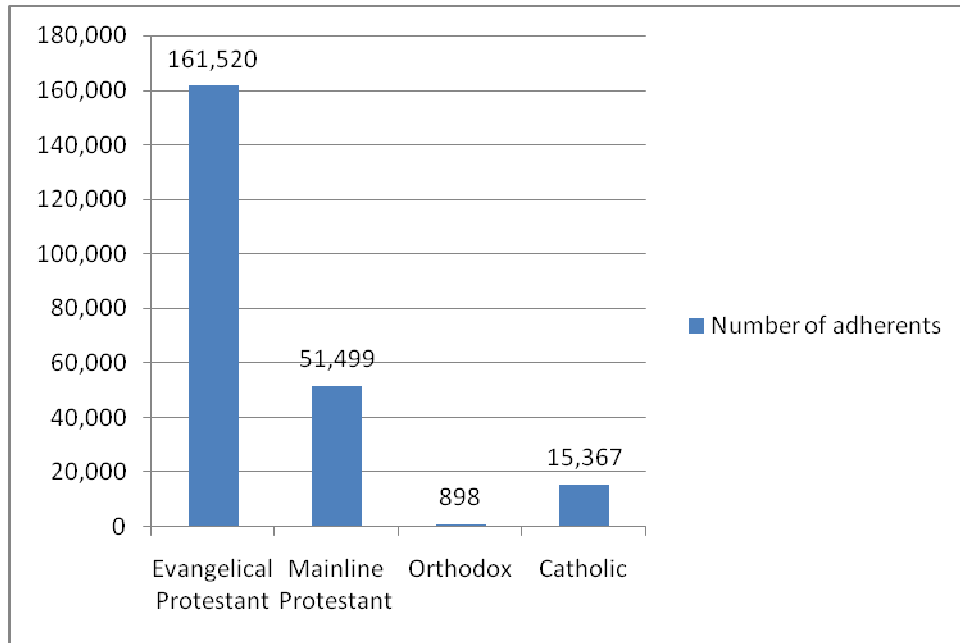


Source: www.thearda.com



Source: www.thearda.com

Number of Evangelical Protestants in Knox County compared to Mainline Protestants, Catholics, and Orthodox adherents, according to the Association of Religion Data Archives

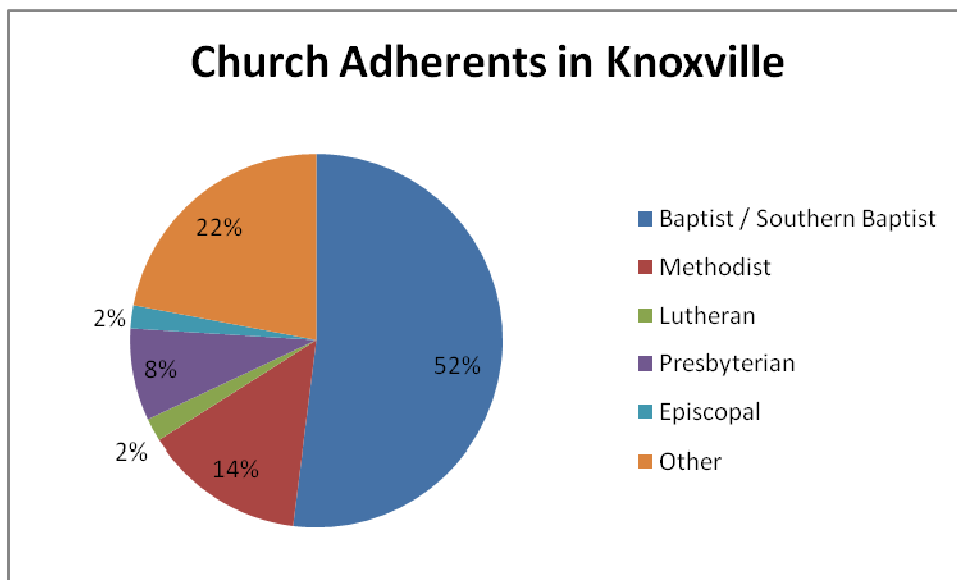


Source: www.thearda.com

Adherents include adults and children as opposed to “members,” which includes only adult members. The Association of Religion Data Archives (ARDA) has indicated, “Congregational ‘adherents’ include all full members, their children, and others who regularly attend services.” The ARDA’s research does not necessarily reflect the changes that have occurred after the year 2000.

For more information on how adherents were determined, as well as the limitations surrounding the ARDA’s research, see: http://www.thearda.com/mapsReports/RCMS_Notes.asp.

According to the Association of Religion Data Archives, of people in Knox County who indicated that they were Evangelical Protestant, Mainline Protestant, Orthodox, Catholic, or “Other,” more than 50% claimed to be Southern Baptist. Knox County contains a larger percentage of Baptists and Presbyterians than U.S. averages.



Source: www.thearda.com

Church Size in Knoxville

City of Knoxville – No other city in Tennessee has more megachurches than does Knoxville. Five of Knoxville’s Protestant megachurches are Baptist.

Knoxville’s Protestant Megachurches”

| <u>Name of Church</u> | <u>Website</u> |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| Westpark Baptist Church | www.west-park.org |
| Cokesbury United Methodist Church | www.cclive.org |
| Central Baptist Church of Bearden | www.cbcbearden.org |
| Sevier Heights Baptist Church | www.sevierheights.org |
| Grace Baptist Church | www.gracebc.org |
| First Baptist Concord | www.fbconcord.org |
| Cedar Springs Presbyterian Church | www.cspc.net |

Megachurch:

Dr. John Vaughan of Church Growth Today has defined a megachurch as a church with 2000+ in attendance. See www.churchgrowthtoday.com. The Hartford Institute for Religion defines a “megachurch” this way... “The term megachurch generally refers to any Protestant congregation with a sustained average weekly attendance of 2000 persons or more in its worship services.” (See <http://hrr.hartsem.edu/megachurch/definition.html>)

For a list of megachurches in Tennessee and the United States, one can go to <http://hrr.hartsem.edu/megachurch/database.htm>. Also, it is possible that Fellowship Evangelical Free Church may also rank among Knoxville’s top megachurches, but as of April 2008 their attendance totals have not been confirmed.

In 2004, Knoxnews.com ran a list of Knox County’s 20 largest churches ranked by membership (also includes Sunday attendance). According to their report, the five largest churches in Knoxville, ranked by membership and attendance were:

Membership:

- | | |
|----------------------------------|---------------|
| 1. First Baptist Concord | 6,495 members |
| 2. All Saints Catholic Church | 6,000 members |
| 3. Temple Baptist Church | 6,000 members |
| 4. Sacred Heart Cathedral | 4,666 members |
| 5. Sevier Heights Baptist Church | 4,450 members |

Attendance:

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1. First Baptist Concord | 4400 (average Sunday attendance) |
| 2. All Saints Catholic Church | 3200 (average Sunday attendance) |
| 3. Temple Baptist Church | 3000 (average Sunday attendance) |
| 4. Cedar Springs Presbyterian Church | 2769 (average Sunday attendance) |
| 5. Sevier Heights Baptist Church | 2644 (average Sunday attendance). |

The full list of Knoxville’s 20 largest churches can be viewed online be at: <http://web.knoxnews.com/special/godbiz/list.shtml>. Contact information and data for each of the 20 churches is included in the report. Not surprisingly, considering the significantly larger proportion of Baptist churches in Knoxville compared to U.S. figures, **10 of Knox County’s twenty largest churches are Southern Baptist.**

House Churches in Knoxville

In addition to traditional forms of “church” in Knoxville, there are growing numbers of house churches (or simple/alternative churches).

Below is a sampling of house churches which contain websites (There are more expressions of “house churches” or “simple churches” meeting in Knoxville than what is listed here. Many do not contain websites, and some of which would likely not have a name.)

| <u>Name of House Church</u> | <u>Website</u> |
|---|--|
| 1. Little Flock: A Community of Knoxville-Area House Churches | www.littleflockknox.blogspot.com |
| 2. Riverside Church in Knoxville | www.riversideknoxville.org |
| 3. Trinity Church | www.hometown.aol.com/roopcjmk/knoxtrinity.html |
| 4. Vineyard Community of Knoxville | www.theonline.org |
| 5. Little Faith Primitive Catholic Church | www.lfftn.org |

Knoxville Magazine recently ran an article on Home Churches. The title was “Home Church: A return to a First Century practice and signs of a spiritual revolution” and it can be viewed here: http://www.knoxmag.com/issues/current/articles/home_church/

Religious and Spiritual Pluralism

Webster defines pluralism as a state of society in which members of diverse religious groups maintain an autonomous participation in and development of their traditional culture and special interest within the confines of a common civilization. In Knoxville, one can find a mosque, a synagogue, a temple, a prayer center, or a church. To an extent, this is the inevitable reality of a city that has witnessed population growth over time, especially with populations coming to Knoxville from other parts of the world and parts of North America where Christianity is not as prevalent as it has been in the Southeast.

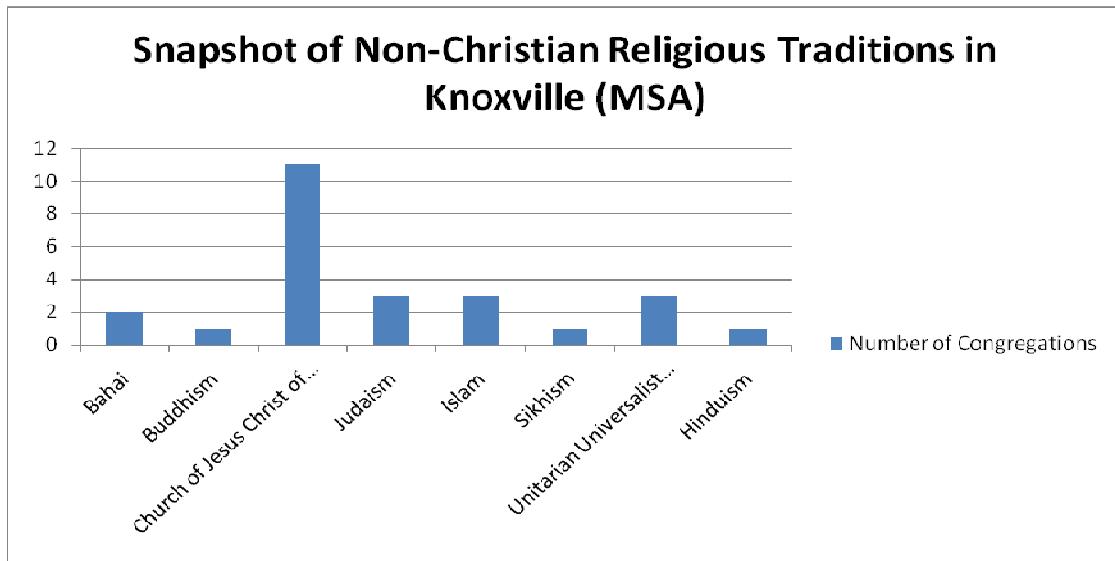
Many Christians may be surprised by the number and diversity of religious worldviews in Knoxville. Understanding that the shadows of “Christendom” are growing smaller and smaller in North America, churches must be prepared to adjust their lenses so that they can remain biblically faithful and contextually appropriate in their mission.

In addition to facilitating worldviews that are grounded in diverse belief and value structures, pluralism often accommodates the belief that “there are many views of reality... and that all of these are of equal validity,” according to resident theologian Jerram Barrs of the Francis Schaeffer Institute of Covenant Theological Seminary in St. Louis, MO. Truth becomes muddy, and relativism becomes the predominant ethic.

Pluralism presents the challenge and the opportunity for churches in Knoxville to love their religiously diverse neighbors and demonstrate the gospel in word and deed among those who are often “displaced” from the cultural contexts of their own religious traditions. Pluralism also demands that churches know what they believe, why they believe what they believe, and how their beliefs will be fleshed out in times that demand for clarity in the communication of the gospel.

Knoxville’s religious culture has changed and will continue to change. While evangelical and mainline protestant church buildings still dominate the religious landscape of the city and county, mixed in among these are other religious traditions. This section will take a brief look at religious pluralism in Knoxville.

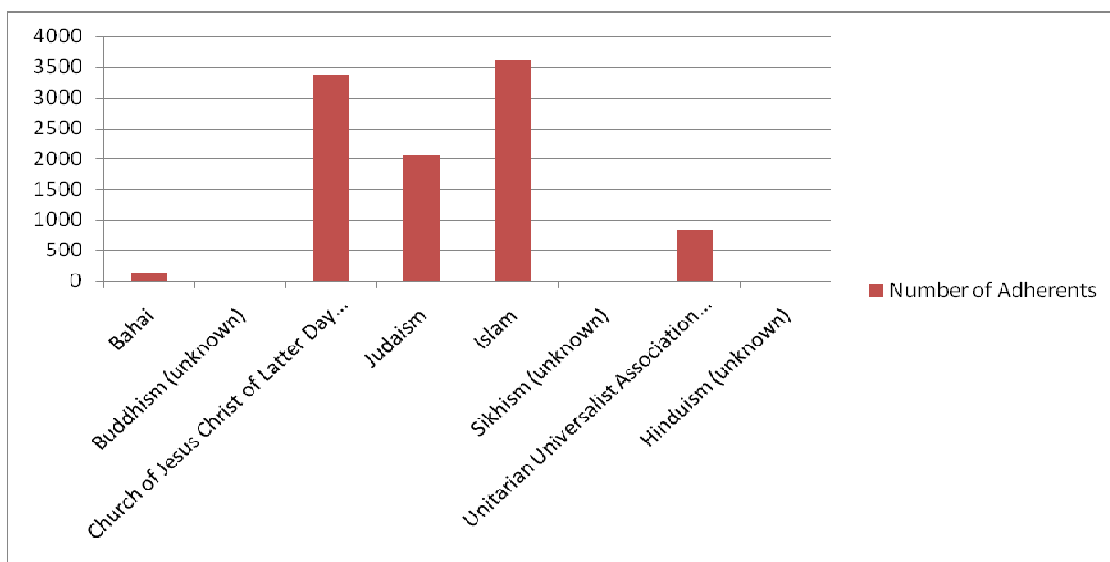
Non-Christian religious traditions in Knoxville's MSA



Source: www.thearda.com

The primary source for these statistics is: *Religious Congregations and Membership in the United States, 2000*, and the Association of Religious Data Archives. According to the ARDA, of the 419,653 persons in the Knoxville MSA who claimed some type of religious affiliation in 2000, more than 10,000 claimed to adhere to some “other” religious tradition, meaning non-Evangelical, non-Mainline Protestant, non-Orthodox, and non-Catholic. Notice that adherents to Buddhism, Sikhism, and Hinduism in Knoxville did not reveal their affiliation to those particular religious traditions. (*Religious Congregations and Membership in the United States, 2000*)

Adherents of various Non-Christian Religious Traditions in Knoxville (MSA)



Source: www.thearda.com

On June 16, 2007, Brian Long of The Knoxville News Sentinel reported that as many as 500 Hindu families live and worship in the Knoxville area.

(see <http://www.pluralism.org/news/article.php?id=16656>)

It should also be stated that nearly 270,000 persons in the Knoxville Metro area did not claim adherence to any religious tradition. (Religious Congregations and Membership in the United States, 2000. See www.thearda.com)

Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism, and Islam in Knoxville

Buddhism

Losel Shedrup Ling Tibetan Buddhist Center of Knoxville
PO Box 31123
Knoxville, TN 37930
Phone: 865-671-0472

Chabad House of Knoxville
7148 Wellington Dr.
Knoxville, TN 37919
Phone: 865-588-8584
Website: www.chabadknoxville.org (Orthodox Judaism)

Hinduism

Hindu Community Center of Knoxville
8580 Hickory Creek Road
Lenoir City, TN 37771
Phone: 423-988-3820
Website: www.knoxvillemandir.org/

Temple Beth El
P.O. Box 10325
3037 Kingston Pike
Knoxville, TN 37939
Phone: 865-524-3521
Website: <http://www.tbeknox.org/> (Reformed Judaism)

Sivananda Yoga Center
2913 Bellevue St.
Knoxville, TN 37917
Phone: 504-343-4056

Islam

Muslim Community of Knoxville Masjid An-noor
100 13th Street
Knoxville, TN 37916
Phone: 865-637-8172
Website: www.anoor.org

Judaism

Heska Amuna Synagogue
3811 Kingston Pike
Knoxville, TN 37919
Phone: 865-522-0701
Website: <http://heskaamuna.org/>
(Conservative Judaism)

The University of Tennessee contains a number of organizations that represent examples of religious pluralism found in Knoxville.

Baha'i Association at UT

Website: <http://web.utk.edu/~asa/utbahais.htm>

Hillel Jewish Student Organization

Website: <http://web.utk.edu/~asa/uthillel.htm>

Kundalini Yoga Club at the University of Tennessee

Website: <http://web.utk.edu/~asa/yogaclub.htm>

Latter Day Saints Student Association (LDSSA)

Website: <http://web.utk.edu/~asa/ldssa.htm>

Manthan (Indian Student Organization) - at the University of Tennessee

Website: <http://web.utk.edu/~asa/manthan.htm>

Muslim Student Association

Website: <http://web.utk.edu/~asa/msa.htm>

Muslim Law Students Association

Website: <http://web.utk.edu/~asa/muslim.htm>

Sampling of events in the development of religious pluralism in Knoxville

- 1834** Mormon missionaries arrived in Tennessee
- 1864** Temple Beth El, the oldest Jewish congregation in East Tennessee is established in Knoxville
- 1890** Heska Amuna Synagogue established as an Orthodox Jewish congregation after splitting with Temple Beth El
- 1930** Jewish Community Center established in Knoxville
- 1949** Tennessee Valley Unitarian Universalist Church established in Knoxville
- 1970s** Muslims (Arab and non-Arab) begin trickling into the Knoxville area, adding to A very small number of Muslims living in Knoxville. Prior to the 1970s, there were only a handful of Arab Muslims in Knoxville working on master's or doctorate degrees. Immigrant Muslims began coming to Knoxville mostly for the purpose of fleeing wars to go to school.
- 1981** Organized Muslim Community purchases a house for worship
- 1980s** Tennessee Valley Authority began hiring more people for technical positions, many of whom were Hindu
- 1985** Hindu Community Center established in Knoxville
- 1987** Westside Unitarian Universalist Church established, becoming Knoxville's second UU church
- 1991** After having raised enough money, the Muslim Community moved into their current mosque
- 1991** First phase of Hindu Community Center in Lenoir City completed
- 1998** Annoor Academy, Knoxville's Islamic School, established, serving Pre-K—7th grade
- 1999** Islamic Education Foundation of Knoxville established to manage the educational aspects of the Knoxville Muslim Community

Other religious expressions in Knoxville

In addition to major world religions and traditions already mentioned, there are a number of other non-Christian religious communities or traditions (and “Christian” sects) with congregations or centers in Knoxville. Below is a list of several religious organizations and groups with websites included. Where no website could be found, contact info is listed...

1. Unity Church of Knoxville
Website: <http://www.unitychurchofknoxville.org/default.php>
2. Christian Science Reading Room
5032 Whittaker Dr. #5, Knoxville, TN 37919
Phone: 865-584-7290
3. Taoist Tai Chi Society (Two locations in Knoxville area)
Website: <http://tennessee.usa.taoist.org/>
4. Guru Ram Das Ashram (Sikhism)
3527 Raines Lane, Knoxville, TN 37920
Phone: 865-579-0582
5. Baha'i Information Center (East TN Regional)
Website: <http://www.discoveret.org/bahais/>
6. Metropolitan Community Church (serves gay men, lesbian, transgender, bisexual, and straight communities of Knoxville)
Website: <http://www.mccknoxville.org/>
7. Wiccan / Neopagan groups
The Knoxville Wicca, Pagans, Shamans, and Magickal Meetup Group
http://www.witchvox.com/vn/vn_detail/dt_gr.html?a=ustn&id=30279
All Spiritual Paths Sacred Wiccan Teaching Group
http://www.witchvox.com/vn/vn_detail/dt_gr.html?a=ustn&id=31173
For other covens/wiccan-related groups, go to
http://www.witchvox.com/vn/gr/ustn_grf.html
8. Jehovah's Witnesses Kingdom Hall
3958 E. Emory Road, Knoxville, TN, 37938 Phone: 865-922-2707
9. Rationalists of East Tennessee (R.E.T.)
Website: <http://www.rationalists.org/>
10. Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (Mormons)
3 Meetinghouses in Knoxville
Website:
<http://www.lds.org/basicbeliefs/meetinghouse/search/1,8016,745-1-PAGE12682154-0-1+6,00.html>

Application / Things to think about

The fact that Knoxville has a larger church-to-population ratio than other cities of similar size (and more churches per capita than any other major city in Tennessee) presents a complex situation. On the one hand, this is a good thing and is a testimony of the work that God has accomplished through his people throughout Knoxville's history. On the other hand, there are several challenges...

- There is a danger that the body of Christ in Knoxville could bask in her accomplishments and become complacent or nominal (at worst) in her ministry and relevance to a changing culture.
- Knoxville's situation is not unlike the challenges facing churches in many North American cities, let alone cities in the West. As populations move into the city region from parts of the country or world where Christianity is on the margins, the body of Christ in Knoxville must be able to clearly communicate and live out the gospel in ways that are understandable to a post-Christian mindset.
- Churches in Knoxville are very homogenous. Sunday continues to be the most segregated day of the week. This was the observation made recently by J. Brian Long, a columnist for the Knoxville News Sentinel. In his story called "Long: Religions in Knoxville alike in big ways," Long, referring to his 45-church tour of Knoxville, stated, "Congregations were not typically racially mixed. Though there were a few exceptions, the overwhelming majority of services I attended were either almost entirely white or entirely black." This must change, and collaboration must take place among white and black churches. This will speak volumes to newer populations relocating and migrating to the city, and it will be a visible apologetic to long time residents of the city. Long's story can be viewed online here: <http://www.knoxnews.com/news/2008/apr/19/religions-in-knoxville-alike-in-big-ways/>.
- Churches must nurture a local heart for mission and ministry, instead of believing that "mission" is only accomplished somewhere else or somewhere overseas.

- Churches and ministry practitioners in Knoxville must bring back into practice the ministries of listening and hospitality, especially in a setting where non-Christian worldviews exist. When people of different cultural and religious traditions see that Christians are genuinely interested in them (and are not simply interested in “converting” them), then they may say something like: “Here is a Christian who is willing to talk to me. He is not lecturing me. He is giving me space to say what I think and feel.” (Strohmer, 128)
- If Christians in Knoxville — where evangelical churches are a strong majority — fail to demonstrate the ministries of Christian hospitality and listening, then there will always be the risk of making the gospel irrelevant, not because the message of the gospel is irrelevant, but because of the messenger’s inability to treat the person with dignity and respect, the same dignity and respect that is due all people who have been made in the image of God.
- J. Andrew Kirk suggests that Christians engaged in the task of encountering diverse religions “should be careful a) to represent other people’s views fairly, especially if we disagree sharply with them; b) not to use ad hominem arguments, i.e. arguments based on the discrediting of some aspect of an opponent’s characteristics, thereby refusing to listen to the arguments themselves.” (Kirk, 133)
- Though Knoxville does have a strong heritage among the Christian community, churches would do well to recognize that Knoxville has had levels of pluralism throughout her past. Consider early “Knoxvillians” such as the ancient Woodland Tribe and Cherokee who once thrived in this region. No doubt they held to religious beliefs that included ideas about a creator, supernatural forces, and an afterlife, but they were most certainly not Christians. And then there were the first European explorers to investigate the area — were these explorers to be considered truly “Christian?” And Mormon missionaries were already at work in the area in the early half of the 19th century. From this, we can see that elements of non-Christian religious diversity have always existed here.

Questions for discussion

1. Do we believe that Knoxville needs more churches, or should we try to help the ones that are struggling first? Why or why not?
2. Do we believe that the body of Christ is making a difference in this city? Why or why not?
3. If Knoxville's churches were to go away in this city, would the city notice? What might change? Why do we feel this way?
4. What does the large number of mega-churches, comparatively speaking, suggest about the body of Christ in Knoxville?
5. How is pluralism a good thing? How is it not a good thing? Talk about the opportunities AND the challenges.
6. Do we know anyone in our community who represents a non-Christian religious tradition (i.e., Muslim, Buddhist, etc.)? Why or why not?
7. If we want to contribute to the betterment of our community, where can we work alongside people of competing worldviews? When/Where can we NOT work alongside people with non-Christian worldviews?
8. Do we really know what we believe, and do the people in our churches know what and why they believe what they believe? Why or why not? What needs to be done about this reality?
9. What can we do to better grasp and live out the gospel of Jesus? What can we do to better understand the worldviews of others in our neighborhood?

Resources for further study

Jerram Barrs. 2001. *The Heart of Evangelism*. Wheaton: Crossway Books.

J. Andrew Kirk, 2000. *What Is Mission?: Theological Explorations*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress.

Charles Strohmer. 2004. *The Gospel and the New Spirituality*. Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers.

Leslie Newbigin. 1989. *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

Ed Stetzer. 2006. *Planting Missional Churches*. Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers.

Helpful websites...

www.thearda.com — The Association of Religion Data Archives.

www.Hirr.hartsem.edu/ — The Harford Institute for Religion Research. Several other references were made to articles or websites and were included in the body or footnotes of this section on “Churches.”

www.pluralism.org — The Pluralism Project at Harvard University.

www.joshuaproject.net — contains information about diverse worldviews and beliefs of different cultures around the world.

www.utk.edu — The University of Tennessee has a Department of Religious Studies. One might consider scheduling a meeting over coffee with a faculty member to discover the types of religious traditions that have made their way into Knoxville. The Department’s website is: <http://web.utk.edu/~religion/>

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/> - CIA’s World Factbook contains information on various cultures around the world.

Knoxville News Sentinel

Staff writer, J. Brian Long, has researched and written a number of stories on “religion” in Knoxville. Most recently, his April 19, 2008 story, “Religions in Knoxville alike in big ways,” can be read here: <http://www.knoxnews.com/news/2008/apr/19/religions-in-knoxville-alike-in-big-ways/> For contacting Long, see www.knoxnews.com.

Studying Knoxville's History

Understanding History in Knoxville

David Calhoun, Professor of Church History at Covenant Theological Seminary in St. Louis, once wrote, “History is information about the past, interpreted and applied. The historian says: this is what happened; this is what we can learn from it. Some of the past we can celebrate; some of it we must simply forgive. But from all of it we can learn lessons for today and tomorrow. The past is usable. Let’s not waste it.” By investigating the history of a neighborhood, community, or city, your group may be able to see the beliefs and values of the people who helped shape the community into what it is today.

The past demonstrates how men and women utilized their God-given gifts and abilities to cultivate a way of life. And the past can show the flawed and often unjust actions of people subject to the human condition — fallen, marred, and in need of redemption. Not surprisingly, the past displays the best and the worst of people.

There is much that can be learned by studying the past of Knoxville, Tennessee. For this mid-sized city along the banks of the Tennessee River — the same city that provided the cultural backdrop for Pulitzer Prize winning authors James Agee (*A Death in the Family*) and Cormac McCarthy (*Suttree*) — there is quite a history. Any church or small group which hopes to proclaim the gospel in word and deed with integrity should consider the history of their community.

The following are a few ways in which small groups and churches can learn more about the history of their community...

Small Group Activities

- Using the resources suggested in this section, and/or by conducting informal interviews of neighbors in your context, develop a historical timeline of your group's neighborhood or community. As you develop the timeline, ask, "What has happened in our neighborhood or community, both good and bad, that has contributed to the picture we see today?"
- Go to the Beck Cultural Exchange, located at 1927 Dandridge Ave., Knoxville, TN 37915 to learn about African American history in Knoxville, as well as the city's culturally-rich past. Take the tour.
- Go to an independent book dealer near your neighborhood, and ask them for the best resources on the history of your area.
- Visit an older neighbor and ask him/her to tell you/your group about their experience growing up in Knoxville.
- Take a few weeks for group members to review some of the suggested resources below. When you come together as a small group, ask for participants to highlight some of their findings. As a group, determine what you will do with this information. Ask, "How do these historical elements help us to better understand our community? Where have people exercised their God-given creativity in helpful or beautiful ways? Where do we see the sin factor present in this community's history, based on our findings?"

Questions for discussion

1. How would we want to be remembered, as a group of people committed to glorifying God by seeking the shalom (Jer. 29:7) of our neighborhood(s) or community?
2. What does the timeline (once it has been constructed/developed) of our neighborhood/ community tell us about God's work within this city? In what ways can we join God in his mission in this community? What needs to change?
3. Did New Testament Christians take into account their community's (i.e., Jerusalem, Antioch, etc.) historical context when proclaiming the gospel? Why or why not? If we took our community's past seriously and learned from it, what would that look like for our group?
4. In our church or community, do we know an "older" person (or group of people) who we could contact to find out more about changes that have taken place in our neighborhood/ community? What questions could we ask him/her?

Resources for Small Groups and churches desiring to study Knoxville's history

1) William Bruce Wheeler, 2000. *Knoxville, Tennessee: A Mountain City in the New South* 2nd ed. Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press.

William Bruce Wheeler's incredibly helpful resource covers much of Knoxville's history from the mid-nineteenth century to the present century.

2) Robert. J. Booker, 1993. *Two Hundred Years of Black Culture in Knoxville Tennessee, 1791 to 1991*. Virginia Beach, VA: The Donning Company Publishers.

Bob Booker provided an excellent resource for navigating Knoxville's African American past. His book, *Two Hundred Years of Black Culture in Knoxville, Tennessee, 1791 to 1991*, should be included in the libraries of ministry leaders in Knoxville.

3) G. Grant and S. Mansfield. 1997. *Faithful Volunteers, The History of Religion in Tennessee*. Nashville: Cumberland House Publishing.

4) The Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture (Online Edition) (The University of Tennessee Press, Knoxville, Tennessee, 2002).

Website: <http://tennesseencyclopedia.net/>

Knoxville: <http://tennesseencyclopedia.net/imagegallery.php?EntryID=K017>

Knox County: <http://tennesseencyclopedia.net/imagegallery.php?EntryID=K016>

5) East Tennessee Historical Society

Address: 601 S. Gay Street, Post Office Box 1629

Knoxville, TN 37901-1629

(865) 215-8824

Website: <http://www.east-tennessee-history.org/>

6) Other web resources that provide a history of Knoxville:

<http://www.ci.knoxville.tn.us/about/history.asp> - The city of Knoxville's website provides a brief overview of Knoxville's history, and it also contains a helpful list of historical societies and organizations, including the East Tennessee Historical Society.

www.knoxville.com - Click on "About Knoxville" for more information on the history of Knoxville.