



Developing a Rural Community Analysis



The Rural Church Pastors Network

www.ruralchurchpastorsnetwork.com



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Understanding and appreciating one's context is vital in experiencing a ministry that is both meaningful and rewarding. It is so easy in ministry to become preoccupied with life inside the church to the point we are unaware of the changing dynamics of community life around us.

Research reveals a lack of understanding in the lives of rural church leaders and denominational leaders in fully understanding the dynamics that make up the community their church is located in. There is also a lack of 'know how' in carrying out and completing a community analysis.

This tool is designed to guide church leaders through the process of carrying out what is called a 'rapid diagnosis' related to a rural community analysis. The analysis will consider and examine the various realms of ecological, economic, political, social, cultural and spiritual health of rural communities in an integrated and experiential manner.

Conducting a community analysis in a 'rapid diagnostic' fashion is quite enjoyable in that you will be meeting personally with key people in your community, and putting your hand as it were, on the pulse of your context. There is a good change you might be surprised a few times along the way as you hear stories and get a deeper appreciation of how your community 'works!' Also, by the time you complete this exercise you will probably be one of the most educated people in your community related to understanding your context in a holistic manner. You will also have a tool that can be used in various contexts, including bringing your own church family and leadership up to speed on the inner workings of the place they hang their hats and call 'home.'

Through this exercise you will also learn to detect both that which hinders or promotes health in the community. Part of your time will be spent in reflecting upon what we have seen and experienced through sociological and theological lenses. Your analysis will culminate in developing a depiction of your community in graphic form through drawing a 'tree' that represents the findings of your analysis along the way. A narrative will also be created to explain the drawing.

The picture of your tree will become a reference point for reflection and continued conversation as you develop effective ministry within your context. To complete the community analysis it will be helpful to have a note book and cell phone to take photos and to audio record conversations.



I conducted a rapid diagnostic analysis of a rural community I had previously 'coached' for six years. I was truly amazed to find in completing this community analysis exercise, I had a deeper awareness and understanding in just over four hours than I had gained in the previous 6 years related to an appreciation for the town, its people, and how our local church could be central to it all! This tool has the potential to educate and inform denominational leaders and rural church leaders alike in communities throughout the province!

*Rev. Dr. Tim Beadle, Church Coach
C&MA, Calgary Alberta*

How the Community Analysis Experience Works...

Take 4 to 5 pictures of your rural community in each of the following areas trying to catch the essence of your community as follows:



ECOLOGY - Consider what is beautiful around you. Capture your parishioners' affection for the place they call home. Take note of the lay of the land, and the impact (positive or negative) that farming, fishing, mining, oil/gas, and businesses are having on the land, water and air quality.



ECONOMY - Consider what people do to gain a livelihood from your community or surrounding region. From what you see, are times good or tough? Are new houses being built, renovations being made, or are there vacant lots or businesses for sale?



POLITICS - Explore who has the voice and decision making power in your community. Capture an understanding of the formal and informal decision making process within which the community is engaged or disengaged. What are the big issues before the community at this current time?



SOCIAL - Note the services, institutions and networks available to members of the community. Where do people meet and enjoy spending time together? Who are the personalities in the community that draw people together?



CULTURAL / SPIRITUAL - Explore the dominant cultural expressions and influences on your community or parishioners. What do people take pride in related to being a resident of this community? What is the religious history of the community? Where did they get their beliefs? Where do people meet to worship and what impact does the church have in the life of the community today? What does the community value and take civic pride in? Who is looked up to in the community (past and present) and why?

Next Steps... Conduct short interviews with key people about life in town and record your impressions... from civic, social and religious leaders to the waitress serving in the local restaurant or operator of the local gas station. Hang out where people gather... at the coffee shop, rec or seniors' centre, hockey or curling rink to schools and the library. Capture the current 'story' of what it means to live in this community. What has brought it to the point it is in and what are the hopes and challenges before it in the coming years.

Remember this is designed to be a '*rapid diagnosis*' of the state of things so aim at feeling the pulse of the people and the flow of the community. Once you believe you have captured a sense of your community, commit your findings to a creating a 'Tree of Life' picture that will personify the story of your community in the areas considered above. Then consider who would benefit from hearing this story and discussing your community's Tree of Life!

The Tree of Life - Community Analysis Tool

The Tree of Life Community Analysis tool allows leaders to create a visual depiction of the condition of their rural community in the areas of Ecology - Economy - Politics - Social - Cultural - Religion. Once the analysis has been completed through personal interviews and researching available data from various segments of the community, the drawing of a 'tree' will be made to personify the findings of the community analysis. Individual parts of the tree will represent and describe various sectors of the community as follows. Once a drawing has been completed, develop a narrative that describes the tree and its unique characteristics.

FOLIAGE

The tree's foliage reflects the CULTURAL and RELIGIOUS health of the community. It is here that civic pride and values are lived out, where faith and worship are expressed within the community.

BRANCHES

The tree's branches represent the SOCIAL networks within the community by which people have reason to connect and socialize with each other.



TRUNK

The tree's trunk represents the community's system of POLITICS, including the decision making process by which change occurs, policies are created, and the participation of community residents is enabled.

ROOT SYSTEM

The tree's root system represents the ECOLOGICAL and ECONOMIC dynamics that impact the community. Related to ecology, matters of air, water and soil quality are noted. Waste disposal and transportation of hazardous materials are considered. Weather patterns and trends are reflected. Related to the Economy, a focus on industry, manufacturing and commerce are represented, including transportation systems.



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