

# Spiritual Health and the Church



Spiritual things are notoriously difficult to measure. Whether we speak of individuals or communities, the core of spiritual life is the heart, which remains largely invisible to others.

We can, however, observe various behaviors that we know are largely influenced by one's spiritual vitality: divorce rates, births to unwed mothers, violent crimes, abortions, truancy rates, performance in school, evidences of racism in business ownership and political rhetoric, and personal bankruptcy rates. We can also attempt to evaluate the presence and effectiveness of churches and parachurch organizations, as difficult as this might be.

**The Shalom Project encourages all Shalom Project partners to take a critical look at each neighborhood they intend to serve and to answer questions like these:**

- What are the evidences of spiritual unhealth in this community?
- What needs are the most pressing ones in this neighborhood?
- Who are the Nongovernmental Organizations (NGOs) and parachurch organizations here?
- What needs is each one meeting?
- Are they well run?
- Who are the neighborhood churches?
- How would these churches be evaluated in the following areas?
  - Preaching and teaching the gospel of Christ and the Bible
  - Making and multiplying disciples
  - Holding members accountable for walking with the Lord
  - Serving the needs of the surrounding neighborhood
  - Integrating word and deed inside the church and in the community
  - Developing local leadership for church and community
  - Praying diligently for the well-being of the neighborhood
  - Including in its membership all ethnic and socio-economic groups in the neighborhood
  - Requiring its leaders to lead godly lives
  - Cooperating with other churches, agencies and organizations

In any case, we must all face this stark reality: the distressed neighborhoods in our city wouldn't be distressed if they were spiritually healthy and if they had spiritually strong churches. There are neighborhoods in our city that are not "distressed," yet are still in need of stronger, healthier churches. There are no distressed neighborhoods that are not in need of stronger, healthier churches. This is not solely their fault nor is it solely the responsibility of the residents in our distressed neighborhoods. Our point is that we share this burden together. We all have a responsibility to bring shalom to every neighborhood.

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**Our observation has been that with all of the virtues we see in our churches, we are suffering in the following areas:**

- The suburban churches are often "cocooned," isolated, and uninformed in a relatively comfortable suburban life, or their efforts to help vulnerable and distressed neighborhoods are lacking vitality and strategic focus. These problems often stem from a negative view of the city and its vulnerable and distressed neighborhoods.
- The "successful" urban churches are sometimes not sufficiently concerned about the distress in their own and surrounding neighborhoods.
- Struggling urban churches in vulnerable and distressed neighborhoods are generally under-resourced and sometimes fail to address adequately the moral, spiritual, and relational issues underlying many of the problems of their members and their neighbors.

- The Church in Memphis – urban and suburban, black and white, rich and poor – is in need of spiritual revival, theological renewal, moral reform and missional revitalization.
- The churches in Memphis are still largely segregated by race and socio-economic categories.
- Parachurch organizations sometimes duplicate ministries and fail to collaborate effectively with local churches.

We believe these things can change, and we strongly encourage church leaders to read our report, consider our “call to action,” and join us in the effort to bring shalom to every neighborhood in Memphis.