

Churches need to recognize what is happening in cities

by Randy Bright <http://www.tulsabeacon.com/?p=1934#more-1934>

The Brookings Institute has released a report entitled Job Sprawl Revisited: The Changing Geography of Metropolitan Employment that indicates the push towards densifying the populations of cities is not achieving the success that proponents hoped to see.

According to the report, “Only 21 percent of employees in the top 98 metro areas work within three miles of downtown, while over twice that share (45 percent) work more than ten miles away from the city center. The larger the metro area, the more likely people are to work more than ten miles from downtown; almost 50 percent of jobs in larger metros like Detroit, Chicago and Dallas locate more than ten miles away on average compared to just 27 percent of jobs in smaller metros like Lexington-Fayette, Boise, and Syracuse.”

The report also stated that more than “30 percent of jobs in utilities finance and insurance, and educational services locate within three miles of downtown” (which means that almost 70 percent choose not to locate within that area) and “at least half of the jobs in manufacturing, construction, and retail are more than ten miles away from central business districts.”

My questions are, why aren't more people moving downtown? Why aren't businesses choosing to locate in the downtown areas? And why are people still moving to the suburbs?

New Urbanists will argue that it is because not enough walkable developments or mass transit have been built in the inner city areas to attract a critical mass of people to live and work there. But that again begs the question, why not? Could it be that there is simply not enough demand?

In a companion article by the Brookings Institute, an example was given of a new business that had been located in a downtown area that attracted a lot of young professionals. However, a study concluded that over an eight year period those jobs migrated away from the downtown area. The article did not mention the cause, but perhaps it is because as the young professionals married and had children, they saw a need to move to the suburbs so that their children could have a yard to play in.

Several months ago, the PlaniTulsa consultant spoke to the local chapter of the American Institute of Architects, and in his presentation he quoted statistics about how our population would be having fewer children, and that the New Urbanism environment would be more conducive to our changing demographics.

But because of human nature, most young people still want to marry and have children; indeed it would be a serious problem if Americans did stop replacing themselves, but that is exactly what is going to happen if we begin forcing our people into more and more compact places and embrace socialism.

Fortunately, as I think this study indicates, suburbs continue to be popular with Americans for a reason, that reason being that given a choice, especially after living in any kind of dense environment (like an apartment complex), most Americans long for some elbow room.

Part of the goal of New Urbanisms is to create cities where people can be close to each other, to have places to meet for coffee or dinner. Close friends and a “Third Place” where everyone knows your name has always been a basic human need, and for many Americans that place has been their church.

Now I know that there are a lot of New Urbanists who think I don’t understand what New Urbanism really is (I’ve heard from a few!), but the truth of the matter is that I have studied it at length, and have read material on both sides, both pro and con.

One of my conclusions is that the kind of churches that people want and the kind of churches that America needs are not included in the New Urbanism codebook.

New Urbanism, though it is not moving as quickly as proponents would like it to, is not going to stop. Because there is so much pressure from so many directions pushing it through, it is the proverbial battleship that can’t be stopped or turned around quickly.

I just returned from the Dave Ramsey town hall meeting where he said something that struck me. He said that if Christians would get their financial lives in order, there is no reason why America’s churches could not put the government out of business.

That means that if churches want to reserve a place in society and in their community so that they can lead this nation back to Christ, they need to recognize what is going on and work proactively to keep themselves in the race.

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