



Quality
Missions

Searching the Suburbs

A Neighborhood Assessment of Peachtree Corners

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Peachtree Corners began as an idea hatched by businessman Paul Duke. He imagined a thriving, dynamic community (in the area once known as Pinckneyville) where people could live, work, and play, eliminating the need for long commutes. It would serve as the home of Technology Park where environmentally friendly, high-tech industries could employ hundreds of workers, including engineers from nearby Georgia Tech.

In the late 1970's Duke's dream began to take shape. Jim Cowart and his son were hired to develop Spalding Corners, the first of many Peachtree Corners neighborhoods that would continue to multiply over the next few decades. In 2011, more than 40 years after Paul Duke first envisioned Peachtree Corners, voters elected to incorporate it as Gwinnett County's 16th and largest city. On July 1, 2012, Peachtree Corners was officially incorporated and six months later over 250 people gathered for a ribbon cutting ceremony at the new city hall to recognize the historic event.

It was in the midst of this rapidly growing community that Perimeter Church was originally planted. Though now a church spanning multiple cities in northeast Atlanta, with its first permanent facility located on Spalding Road in Peachtree Corners, in its early years over 40 years ago, Perimeter Church met in a shopping center located off of Buford Highway in Chamblee, GA. A large number of its founding elders still live in Peachtree Corners, which was selected to be the first of ten area cities to undergo a neighborhood assessment designed to equip Perimeter Church to move from "a church of success to a church of influence and impact" within the community.



Figure 1. Perimeter Church building in Peachtree Corners.



Since Perimeter began its ministry there over four decades ago, Peachtree Corners has undergone dramatic change. What was then a largely homogenous Caucasian population has now grown to include a greater number of minorities who have brought increasing diversity to the city. This racial diversity, however, is predominantly concentrated south of Holcomb Bridge, which serves as an informal dividing line between the city's affluent, highly educated citizens to the north and the minority population, which has a much higher rate of poverty and lower performing schools, to the south.

Intent and Methodology

Perimeter's desire is to take the findings of this assessment and translate them into concrete, actionable steps that flesh out the vision to "make and deploy mature and equipped followers of Christ for the sake of family, community, and global transformation." Perimeter's size and scope provide tremendous opportunity for mobilizing a large number of members, officers, and other churches and organizations in Peachtree Corners to support strategic Kingdom-building targets



Figure 2. A ministry team gathering outside the church before dispersing.

The Peachtree Corners City Ministry Team undertook the initial assessment, focusing on the areas of Discipleship, Family Transformation, and City Transformation through Mercy and Justice. They studied the city through the lens of its three elementary school districts: Simpson, Peachtree, and Stripling, taking time to get to know the wants, dreams and needs of neighbors in these different areas. They surveyed residents door-to-door, interviewed community leaders and influencers, and collected demographic, historic, and



cultural data to complete this reflection. Their goal throughout has been to seek ways to thoughtfully and effectively “bring the people of greater Atlanta and all places where we serve into a life-transforming encounter with the Kingdom of God.”

The following reflection is intended to assist Perimeter Church leaders in the following goals:

1. Understanding the dreams, needs, and assets of its community members
2. Understanding the factors and forces that positively and negatively affect individuals in the community
3. Building connections between Perimeter Church and the Peachtree Corners communities, as well as partnering with existing organizations to facilitate and strengthen those connections
4. Guiding strategic planning and the development of new ministry initiatives
5. Perceiving how Perimeter Church and its members are uniquely equipped to carry out these initiatives as well as defining potential roadblocks
6. Engaging community members through creative, effective, wise, and personal relationships

Demographics

The following highlights demonstrate the context of the daily life of the area from a census point of view. While these statistics are hardly representative of the people, it gives interested researchers a starting point to discover the complex reality of a context. The demographics also show that Peachtree Corners can be a very different place based on perspective of individual residents.

Location Description

North of Holcomb Bridge Road

- Where the majority of our members live
- Upper income
- Amenities, Sports, Restaurants, Higher performing schools

South of Holcomb Bridge Road



- Multi-ethnic
- Lower income
- Less business, Lower performing schools



Figure 3. Perimeter Church location in relation to the Holcomb Bridge Road invisible divide.

Population and Household

- Total Population: 42,000 people
- Total Houses: 16,000 households
- 54% of population has a college degree
- 55% Owner Occupied
- 45% Tennant Occupied
- 18% Single Moms
- 6% Single Dads

Income and Poverty

- \$66K Average Income



- \$88K White
- \$42K Black
- \$36K Hispanic
- 4,900 people living in poverty or 10.6%
- 1,427 people on food stamps

RACE AND ETHNICITY (total & by school)

	Total	*Peachtree	Simpson	Stripling
White	52%	9%	68%	3%
Hispanic	13%	43%	7%	52%
Black	23%	41%	8%	41%
Asian	9%	2%	12%	1%
Other	3%	5%	5%	3%
Free/Reduced lunch.		80%	7%	87%

Table 1. Race and Ethnicity represented in the public schools.

Study Observation

During the study, surveys and interviews were conducted with a variety of local residents in an effort to compile personal accounts and an understanding of life in Peachtree Corners. Both common and disparate values, desires, and concerns emerged from the conversation. In fact, as the study progressed, a “Tale of Two Cities” between those living in the more privileged Simpson school district and those residing in the underprivileged Peachtree and Stripling districts emerged. Though racially diverse in number, with 52% White, 22% Black and 14% Hispanic residents, minority populations are concentrated in the city’s poorer neighborhoods and have significantly less opportunities to enjoy an adequate standard of living. In fact, Black and Hispanic residents earn, on average, \$49,000 less per year than their white neighbors to the north. A surprising 10.6% of the population live in poverty and rely on government assistance to meet basic needs. Included below are impressions from our observations and exchanges with community members.

Families residing north of Holcomb Bridge in the Simpson school district live a life of relative comfort and ease, enjoying higher incomes, a variety of amenities, and access to the best public and private schools. The Forum and Town Center shopping areas house retail establishments that cater to customers



from nearby high-end neighborhoods. Neighborhoods are clean, quiet, and serene and residents value the comfort and convenience afforded by their lifestyle.

Parents are highly involved in their children's academic and extracurricular activities and the community often comes together for holiday celebrations and fundraising events. When asked what improvements could be made to their community, Simpson families had a difficult time answering, instead offering comments like, "We hit the jackpot in this area with great schools, churches, and neighbors."

Living conditions in the Peachtree and Stripling areas stand in striking contrast to that of their northern neighbors, especially in the southern areas closer to Buford Highway where lower-income, multi-ethnic populations reside. Here, access to gainful employment, enrichment activities for children, and college opportunities are limited. These districts, by far, have the highest percentage of people living below the poverty level, speaking limited English, and relying on public transportation. More than 80% of students attending Peachtree and Stripling schools receive free lunch, another astounding difference between the northern and southern parts of the city.

When asked what they loved about the community, many Stripling residents answered, "Nothing." They distrust city leadership, citing neglect of infrastructure such as streets and intersections as well as enforcement of what residents claim are burdensome codes. They also expressed a desire for more family-friendly activities to be offered and claimed feeling overlooked or neglected by their government.

Community and Connectivity

The Simpson area is home to many groups, communities, and traditions that locals value and participate in. Neighborhoods often host July 4th and Halloween parades and parties and come together once a year to raise funds for the local YMCA. These activities have fostered a sense of togetherness and promoted an atmosphere of safety and comfort for families looking for a good place to raise their families. In contrast, Peachtree and Stripling residents find themselves with limited opportunities for working and playing together as a community. Lack of disposable income, language barriers, and cultural differences create dividing lines that are difficult to cross. One exception is Jones Bridge Park on the Chattahoochee River. Though located in the Simpson district,



Stripling families have been known to hold family and community gatherings here.

One surprising piece of data that emerged from the study is the large percentage of commuters making their way to and from Peachtree Corners to work each day. Over 36,000 people commute into the city each day, while over 16,000 commute out. Only 1,701 people actually travel within PTC to work on a daily basis. This creates an interesting and challenging dynamic where the majority of people, instead of working and playing where they live, leave where they live to work and play. It is ironic to note that eliminating commutes and creating a community where people would stay to work and play was an intentional part of Duke's original plan.

Community and Commerce

Peachtree Corners' diverse demographics also affect the commercial and retail options available to residents. There are essentially two "town centers": The newly created Town Center attracts higher-end customers from the Simpson area while the newly renovated Peachtree Corners Marketplace attracts many in the Holcomb Bridge area. The latter is thriving and sits at the border of the "two cities," one place where the entire community can come together in a healthy way. Chick-fil-A at Peachtree Corners Market has a diverse employee base and is another location where the community comes together.



Figure 4. Peachtree Corners Marketplace in the community.

With the construction of new townhomes and plans for new apartment developments along the Holcomb Bridge corridor, the cost of living in Peachtree



Corners is rising rapidly. There is concern that the demolition of older buildings will displace poor and working-class families who will no longer be able to afford the higher rent at the new buildings. In addition, many helping professionals such as teachers and police officers cannot afford to live in Peachtree Corners.

Community and Education

Three elementary school districts occupy Peachtree Corners with schools in the Simpson district enjoying higher levels of resources and achievement than its counterparts in Peachtree and Stripling. While parent involvement in Simpson schools revolves around academic and extracurricular activities, Peachtree and Stripling schools actively seek support from local businesses, non-profits, and churches to help with its large variety of educational and cultural needs.



Figure 5. School aged children working on a craft at Perimeter Church.

The two major public schools, Pinckneyville Middle and Norcross High, have grown increasingly under resourced as affluent families often opt to send their children to one of the highly regarded private schools in the area. In addition, Pinckneyville Middle School is where students from all three elementary school districts converge, creating a unique melting pot where cultural, economic, and spiritual differences often collide. A meeting with the principal provided valuable insights about the school and the families it serves. He envisions a “hub” for service, provided at a neutral location or on-site at a church, to provide free or low-cost laundry service for poor families who are part of the school community. He also expressed the need to empower the community to express needs, prioritize options and take ownership for



outcomes--a hand up vs. hand out model that invites community members to see themselves as “needed” instead of “needy.”

Also noteworthy is the establishment of Paul Duke STEM High School, which opened its doors in 2018. Families with backgrounds from India and East Asia are accelerating the diversity in the Simpson district as well as elevating academic excellence in the areas of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics.

Industry and Government

The community is home to multiple industries which employ a variety of white-collar professionals as well as blue collar tradesmen and service workers. Technology Park is a fast-growing “innovation hub” geared towards modern workplaces and their millennial workforces. Though Technology Park’s dozens of large and small businesses have created new jobs, yet only 15% of employees are able to afford living in Peachtree Corners.

Relationships with police and firefighters are present and efficient. Certain neighborhoods have a much higher incidence of crime and drugs. Prostitution and child trafficking have been reported near Holcomb Bridge and there is concern that this crime is beginning to spread into the suburbs. Meetings with key government officials revealed a tendency to favor making improvements for those already enjoying privilege and influence while overlooking those living in the lower income parts of the city. Peachtree and Stripling residents perceive this gap and report that they distrust city leadership, citing their neglect of infrastructure such as streets and intersections as well as enforcement of what residents claim are burdensome codes. They also expressed a desire for more family-friendly activities to be offered and claimed feeling overlooked or neglected.

Faith and Religion

Perimeter Church and other Unite churches desire to find common outreach opportunities where members from both churches can begin serving on a volunteer basis. The City Ministry Team agrees that Unite churches are already doing important, effective work in reaching out to those who are lost and in need and desire to develop deeper relationships and partnerships going forward. A mutual desire to create robust “greet, befriend, invite” opportunities could culminate in joint worship services, perhaps at the new Town Center, and lead to a more visible presence in the community.



Perimeter Church Assets

Perimeter Church has over 620 members, 50 discipleship leaders, 16 connect groups, and 51 officers who reside in Peachtree Corners. Among these members, there already exists a strong discipleship ministry with 74% in discipleship groups and 24% in Connect groups, as well as the most dense concentration of funding dollars. There is tremendous opportunity for mobilizing this large number of members, officers, and even other churches in Peachtree Corners in support of fleshing out Perimeter's threefold call to missions.



Figure 6. Perimeter Church volunteers serving in children ministry.

The City Ministry Team, as well as a number of other Peachtree Corners members have already established connections to a number of like-minded organizations and influential community leaders. Among these are:

The Georgia Center of Opportunity (Randy Hicks)
Corners Outreach
Norcross Drug Rehab
Legion for Hope, Bridges (Joe Sawyer)
Unite! Partner Churches
A Better Woman Foundation
Promise 686
Neighborhood Cooperative Ministries
Rainbow Village
Home Repair Ministries
Fully Furnished Ministries

Additional connections are being made within each of the three elementary schools and Pinckneyville's current principal both understands the



diversity/divide issue within Peachtree Corners and is eager to work with churches to help bridge them.

Perimeter Church in Peachtree Corners is made up of a community of believers committed to following Christ. Wonderful opportunities exist for current ministry models to expand and grow to meet the needs of its Peachtree Corners neighbors more intentionally. Members living in the more affluent areas can be challenged to see the need that exists just beyond their neighborhoods and make efforts to engage the materially and spiritually impoverished populations to the south. Current partnerships and connections can be further developed and new networks, such as with businesses in Technology Park, can be created.

Next Steps

The City Ministry Team has sought to prayerfully, thoughtfully, and winsomely engage the Peachtree Corners community for the purpose of learning how Perimeter Church can use its God-given gifts and assets to Make Disciples, Transform Families, and Transform Peachtree Corners through Mercy and Justice. The fields are ripe for the harvest. We see the good we ought to do, and now we seek God's wisdom to know how we ought to do it. Following are some possible action steps that can lead to mobilizing our church for God's Kingdom, while taking care to build relationships first as a foundation for sharing the gospel over time. Steps are to be facilitated through the Peachtree Corners Ministry Team.

Make Disciples

Start at least one Connect Group within each elementary school district within Peachtree Corners.

Engage Unite churches to mentor students in need by leveraging connections and partnerships with nonprofits such as Georgia Center of Opportunity, Corners Outreach, Bridges, etc.

Family Transformation

Begin a new Men's and Women's Journey Group within each elementary school within Peachtree Corners every year, starting in 2020, using connect groups as a catalyst.

Identify Pinckneyville Middle School families in need and mobilize volunteers to provide practical support for issues related to budgeting, resource management, and practical living.



City Transformation through Mercy and Justice

Identify and mobilize Perimeter and Unite members to serve as tutors in each of the three elementary schools and as math and science tutors for Pinckneyville Middle School by September of 2020.

Develop and grow partnerships with organizations already meeting community needs such as GCO, Corners Outreach, Foster Care organizations, etc.

Closing Remarks

The home page of our website states, “Perimeter is a place to explore and experience the love found in Christ. If you're not really sure you believe in God at all, you're welcome here. If you've been following God your entire life or if you're new to faith, we hope you'll grow here. No matter where you are on the road to faith, we are here to walk alongside you as you go. Our hope is that on your journey, you'll discover a God who is loving, active and causing you to flourish in all that you do.” Our desire is to use this study to grow our threefold mission to Make Disciples, Transform Families, and Transform Peachtree Corners so its residents may flourish as our loving, active God intends them to. We are excited to work together, through intentional prayer and led by the Spirit, to fulfill Christ’s call to love our neighbors and bring the hope of the gospel to Peachtree Corners.