

5 ways to communicate to the 'Nones' – who aren't listening

According to the latest Pew Research, the “Nones” are growing. These unchurched individuals aren't actively seeking a church, which means engaging them requires a careful and thoughtful approach.

A survey taken in the summer of 2023 shows that the Nones, who made up 5–7% of Americans in the 1980s, have swelled to 28% of Americans. As believers, we need to decide if we try to reach this unchurched group, who are “characterized as morally directionless,” or shake our heads and not even attempt the challenge. I would argue the question is not “if” but “how.”

Remember, Nones are not all the same, but they all need Jesus.

Here are some strategies to help effectively communicate to the Nones in your local community who may not be actively seeking a religious connection:

Community-centered communication

Why it matters: People are often more receptive to messages that address their immediate needs or interests. To reach Nones, focus on communicating how your church contributes positively to the community (them) rather than emphasizing religious aspects. Get their attention, then love them to Jesus.

How to do it: Highlight community events, outreach programs and ministries that benefit your local community. Emphasize the practical ways your church is positively impacting the area, such as through charity work, support services or events that bring people together. As the Pew report notes, they

probably won't be the first to volunteer, but they're more than likely seeking a community that wants to make a difference.

Storytelling with purpose

Why it matters: Stories have the power to connect on a personal level. Share narratives that resonate with the everyday experiences of the unchurched, emphasizing the positive transformations within your church community. Remember, about half the Nones consider themselves spiritual, so they believe people can change based on something inward.

How to do it: Use testimonials and personal stories to showcase the real-life impact your church has had on an individual's spirituality. Focus on stories of personal growth, community support and the tangible benefits of being part of your church, steering clear of overly religious language in the beginning.

Social media engagement

Why it matters: Many unchurched individuals are active on social media. Utilize these platforms to create a digital presence that aligns with the values and interests of your community, fostering a connection that can lead to a gospel-centered conversation.

How to do it: Share visually appealing and shareable content showcasing your church's activities, events and contributions to the community. Encourage your members to share the experiences, creating a digital word-of-mouth effect. You may even want to consider TikTok videos to help communicate to the Nones. Think about how your church can become highly practical and entertaining to them!

Low-pressure invitations

Why it matters: Traditional invitations to church services may

be intimidating for the Nones. Perhaps that is why 90% of them seldom attend a church service. Instead, extend low-pressure invitations to events that are easy to attend, needed by them and don't carry the expectation of religious commitment.

How to do it: Host community gatherings, workshops or social events that cater to a wide audience. Position these events as opportunities for connection (community), learning or fun without emphasizing the religious aspect. Think how the church can coordinate and facilitate what they already are doing (i.e. pickleball, game nights, eating, etc.). Use this time to love them and start sharing the gospel.

Demonstrate relevance to their daily life

Why it matters: 81% of Nones see religion as irrelevant to their daily lives. Showcase how your church addresses relevant issues, provides practical guidance and supports people in their day-to-day issues.

How to do it: Incorporate practical teachings that they would be interested in into your communication. Address common life struggles, such as stress, anxiety, relationships and personal growth. The Nones may even be open to a cooking class by a grandmother from your church. Emphasize how your church is a resource for navigating life's challenges and building a supportive community. They don't know it yet, but you can help them discover how Jesus does that to perfection.

In essence, the key is to meet people where they are and communicate to the Nones in a way that resonates with their interests and needs. It's not going to be easy.

By emphasizing community contributions, sharing relatable stories, leveraging social media, extending inclusive invitations and demonstrating relevance to daily life, your church can build bridges with the Nones who may not be actively seeking a religious connection. Then pray that the Holy Spirit will open their hearts so your relationship and

engagement can lead to the gospel message. They need Jesus.

EDITOR'S NOTE – Mark MacDonald is a communication pastor, speaker, consultant, bestselling author, church branding strategist for BeKnownforSomething.com, and executive director of Center for Church Communication, empowering 10,000+ churches to become known for something relevant (a communication thread) throughout their ministries, websites, & social media. His book, Be Known for Something, is available at BeKnownBook.com.