



Quality
Missions

Lawrence Township

A Neighborhood Assessment for Common Ground
Northeast

by Nathan Ivey

Ivey, Nathan. *Lawrence Township: A Neighborhood
Assessment for Common Ground Northeast*. Quality
Missions. January 15, 2022. qualitymissions.net.



Common Ground Christian Church Northeast is excited to enter a season of fresh growth and opportunity evidenced by our new lead pastor, staff, and the acquisition of a new building four years ago. We branched off from Common Ground Midtown in Indianapolis three years ago and have since become a dynamic, growing congregation composed of multiple generations and ethnicities.

As a church, it's our desire to influence the Indianapolis community in a lasting, impactful manner. Given our location in an older, more stable neighborhood, we wanted to see and explore new and fresh opportunities for our church body to serve and connect with our surrounding neighbors.

To do this, we commissioned a team of members to conduct an in-depth neighborhood assessment of the area directly surrounding the church. The team took the time to get to know our neighbors, both their dreams and needs. They surveyed residents door-to-door, interviewed neighborhood leaders and influencers, and collected demographic, historical, and cultural data to complete this reflection. Our goal has been to discover and partner with the reconciling mission of Jesus by effectively understanding, encouraging, serving, and supporting individuals in our community.



Figure 1. Common Ground Northeast started in Lawrence North High School.

History of Lawrence Township

Lawrence Township, established in 1822, exists as one of nine townships in Marion County, Indiana. Previously known as "Lanesville," the city was officially titled "Lawrence" in 1866 after Captain James



Lawrence. Castleton, a commercial neighborhood in Lawrence Township, was originally established as a small village in 1843 when Reverend James T. Wright bought the land on which the neighborhood now resides. This location was originally a stop on the Nickel Plate Railroad, now known as 82nd Street. Later, housing development projects in the late 20th Century developed vast farmland and vacant properties into the current urban area.

Castleton became an “included town” in 1970 under Unigov, Indianapolis’ consolidated city-county government. These towns are fully subject to Indianapolis’ laws and governmental control. However, Castleton officially suspended the title of “included town” and reverted to the City of Indianapolis in 1992. Lawrence is one of four “excluded cities” in Indianapolis’ Unigov, maintaining its own municipal government.

Neighborhood Observations

During the neighborhood study, surveys and interviews were conducted with a variety of locals in an effort to compile personal accounts and an understanding of life in Indianapolis. Common values, desires, and concerns emerged from the conversations. Included below are a few impressions from our observations and exchanges with neighbors surrounding Common Ground Christian Church Northeast.

Family and Tradition

Our neighborhood is predominantly composed of families. Therefore, the area mainly consists of single-family homes. Two large apartment complexes, Lake Castleton Apartments and Shadeland Station Apartments, also reside in the community. A large multi-family development, Castleton Farms, is popular in the area.



Figure 2. Common Ground Northeast family event.



It became clear through our conversations that our neighborhood prioritizes family over other aspects of their life and makes regular sacrifices on their family's behalf. Neighborhood traditions such as holiday parades are valued by and popular amongst local residents. Multiple churches provide Vacation Bible Schools during the summer months for youth engagement. Castleton United Methodist Church offers a “live nativity” each Christmas that is well attended, as well as a popular annual Easter egg hunt. This means that our neighbors want to spend lots of quality time with their families and this results in a strong connection to the community.

Lawrence North High School also serves as a community anchor through sporting events. The school’s male basketball games are anticipated events which offer a strong sense of community tradition. The high school has also become a hub for popular annual robotics competitions.

Community and Commerce

The area surrounding Common Ground Northeast provides a variety of fast-food restaurants for on-the-go residents. There are not many healthy alternatives to the bevy of drive-through options. Additionally, there is a small range of fitness/gym options outside of Planet Fitness. The neighborhood contains both a Walgreens and CVS, a popular farmer’s market (Binford), and the Indianapolis Public Library. These community and commerce establishments reflect the busy lifestyles and family-centric trends of the community.

Over the past months, a noticeable decline in commerce centers has taken place and is often discussed in-depth by local community groups. A large topic of recent discussion includes Marsh Grocery Store’s closing at 75th Street and Shadeland and two massage parlors moving into the vacant spaces.

Because of the decline, a local group known as “BRAG” (Binford Redevelopment and Growth) was created in 2005 to serve as a resource for commercial and residential enhancement in the area. The group often hosts events, fundraisers, and informational meetings as a social service to the community. The following reflection is intended to assist Perimeter Church leaders in the following goals:

There is regular foot traffic on Shadeland and the 75th Street area, as well as the 82nd Street medical complexes. Students are often walking to and from Lawrence North High School during hours beyond normal educational scheduling (6AM and 5PM) for athletic or extracurricular events. Also,



recreational foot traffic on the 71st Street multi-use path is steady during pleasant weather.

Vocation and Industry

The local area is home to a large variety of healthcare establishments, including hospitals, pharmacies, clinics, private practices, and offices. Healthcare is central to our community and our healthcare establishments and local hospitals serve as the community's prime infrastructures.

The neighborhood is also home to multiple law firms, insurance agencies, banks and financial firms, engineering firms, and property management services, making it a highly professional community.

The area is also home to multiple kindergarten through twelfth grade schools, as well as Vet Tech Institute and International Business College. Our neighborhood also offers multiple retail centers and art studios that locals and visitors alike enjoy.

Government Law and Authority

Within the neighborhood, there is a relatively small law enforcement presence. There is no central government building as well as limited visible political activity. In the news, the neighborhood is rarely mentioned or addressed. Our area sits in a location between Lawrence Municipality and Indygov, and often functions apart from community engagement and connection to government power structures.

Religion

Our neighborhood is home to many different faiths and denominations. Our particular area contains Abundant Life Church, Faith Presbyterian Church, Antioch Independent Christian Church, Church of the Nativity, Castleton United Methodist Church, and multiple others.

While there are multiple churches within the neighborhood, many locals do not regularly attend or attend church at all. Many pastors mention Lawrence as a highly sought-after area in which to plant a church due to need, though current neighbors do not often visit the already-present congregations. Some locals have commented that this is due to congregations not accurately mirroring the demographics of the community. The community's general perception is that churches are comprised of mostly white, middle-class citizens. Local churches



don't consistently, accurately match the community's demographics of single person and single-family households.



Figure 3. Common Ground Northeast worship service.

Neighborhood Surveys

The majority of surveyed and interviewed individuals commented on the socio-economic status and diversity of the area, specifically surrounding Geist/Fishers, Northeast Indianapolis, Oaklandon, and the Pendleton Pike. Of special note is the local educational infrastructure, with public schools possessing a higher racial minority representation than the surrounding community. Also highlighted was the constant developmental fluctuation around Castleton Square Mall and the cultural diversity of the area. Many expressed concerns about crime rates spreading east-ward following the rebuilding of Fountain Square and Irvington. Additionally, as investors seize opportunities to “revitalize” the community, lower-income families and individuals are seeking new homes eastward around Pendleton Pike and Fort Harrison. The city is also building up 82nd Street toward Oaklandon and McCordsville. In accordance with widespread development and economic change, there is growing concern surrounding the future market of the area.

Overall, five common desires for the neighborhood emerged. These points are in no specific order.

1. Neighborhood Maintenance and Safety: Dogs kept on leashes, no solicitors, and keeping rental costs to a minimum
2. Food Market: Due to economic shifting and various store closings, new need for easily accessible neighborhood food market and quality retail options



3. Economic Improvement: Hopes that Castleton redevelopment efforts will raise the level of commerce, improve infrastructure, and provide opportunities for local business in the area
4. Student Success: To join forces with the community (neighborhoods, government programs, businesses, and churches) to provide mentors, positive life experiences, work opportunities, and additional support outside the classroom
5. Beautification: Local clean-up and improvement efforts to maintain appearance of community and vacant spaces

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.

Highlights

Our community houses over 20% of the city's single-mother households.

Single-person families comprise 37% of our community, second to married families/households at 48.5%.

Our community is home to 3.8% of the city's 4.1% of non-U.S. citizens.

SNAP is provided to 92,200 individuals in Indianapolis, and our community is home to 6% of SNAP recipients.

The median age of our community is 34, while older adults (ages 45-62) comprise the largest population group of our community at 36.7%.

Our neighborhood is home to 12.5% of the city's black population and 4.4% of the city's Hispanic and Latino population.



Figure 4. Common Ground Northeast Location.

Population and Household

- Total Population: 23,120 people
- Total Houses: 10,195 households
- Married: 4,947 (48.5%)
- Single Female: 733 (7.2%)
- Single Male 266 (2.6%)
- One Person Family: 3,807 (37.3%)
- Single Mother Households: 431 (20.2%)

Income and Poverty

- \$66.7K Average Income
- \$76.8K All White
- \$32.8K Black



- \$78.7K Non-Hispanic White
- 641 (6.1%) on supplemental nutrition assistance program (SNAP)
- 427 people on food stamps



Figure 5. Common Ground small group activity in the community.

Common Ground Context

Common Ground Christian Church Northeast owns a building which is easily accessible within the neighborhood. The property contains a parking lot, basketball goal, and will soon hold a playground. The building and property provide a low-cost/no-cost physical space for hosting events in the community, as well as a space for other faith communities to meet. The multiple house churches also serve as physical spaces to meet and facilitate intentional community.

The members of Common Ground Christian Church Northeast possess a heart for advocacy and desire to witness both racial reconciliation and healthy mentorship established within the community. The congregation understands that the church is attended by a higher percentage of Caucasian individuals compared to the city at large. The local school is diverse due to a district magnet program, and many members are enthusiastic to invest in youth through mentorship at local schools and government programming.

Additionally, Common Ground Northeast members and leadership see a need for a community playground and/or green space and garden to unite families and establish fellowship. As members desire to minister to local students and families, they are also eager to steward available financial assets to bridge resources not easily accessible to some families and youth. 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. Common Ground Northeast desires local racial reconciliation and is thus hiring new staff to represent the diversity valued within the neighborhood.

Congregation members are quick to open their homes for meetings and gatherings. Individuals within Common Ground Northeast are well-connected within the city and state, and regularly network with and participate in ministries and non-profit organizations such as Bonner, GO Ministries, and Butler Athletes in Action. Common Ground Christian Church Northeast is also a member of the Common Ground Network/Family, which provides multiple opportunities and connections for growth and ministry.

Common Ground Christian Church Northeast possesses the gifts of community and boldness, as well as a heart for advocacy. Multiple baptisms have taken place lately, as well as the offering of financial and spiritual support for members undergoing difficult circumstances. Gifts worth fostering include the church's hospitality, theological diversity, and gracious and accepting community. Also, there is large potential with our youth ministry due to the many families, as well as with our strong connection as a smaller church.

Ministry Implications

The area directly surrounding the church is a predominantly Caucasian community and does not visibly appear high-need. In contrast, the schools within the community are diverse and often express need for resources. Common Ground Christian Church Northeast believes, however, that the community near the campus is more diverse than the community that actually appears on demographic data. There is often a "disconnect" in what our presence means to the local community, how diverse Sunday morning attendance appears, and the ways in which we can serve within a racially and socioeconomically diverse school system.

The neighborhood is also home to multiple generations, which is a great blessing, but can often result in conflict over topics of commerce and education. Older generations yearn for the return of staple businesses, and younger generations exhibit frustration regarding education options. Overall, however, no one is pleased with the dwindling options of quality commerce in



the neighborhood, as well as rising suspicions surrounding investment sources into the area.

Common Ground Christian Church Northeast sees itself as a “connector” and advocate of all residents, regardless of race, age, or socioeconomic status.



Figure 6. Common Ground members greeting one another at a Sunday gathering.

This assessment and reflection do not attempt to solve all the difficulties presented in the area surrounding Common Ground Christian Church Northeast but seek to effectively equip us in understanding and loving our neighbors. Statistics grant a helpful overview of the community; yet, nothing replaces the importance of personally building and establishing relationships with our neighbors.

Regardless of the assessment’s conclusion, the learning process continues. We are not seeking “quick fixes.” Rather, Common Ground Christian Church Northeast desires long-lasting physical and spiritual growth in Indianapolis and beyond.

For some individuals, this study may solely lead you to getting to know your neighbor. For others, it might mean pursuing direct opportunities to plug in and serve your neighborhood utilizing your spiritual gifts, time, finances, or career skills. For each member of Common Ground Northeast, this knowledge of our neighborhood should stir us to prayer and care in a deeper and more distinct manner as we seek to further the Kingdom here on earth. Connecting with our neighbors mirrors Jesus’ pursuit of His children and establishes deep, transformative relationships that shows others their inherent, God-given worth.



Figure 7. Common Ground youth play an outdoor game.

For Common Ground Christian Church Northeast, this completed assessment will provide specific ways we can pray for our neighborhood and offer a variety of service opportunities. Because we have taken steps in understanding the personal desires and needs of our community, we are able to move forward in offering intentional relationships, planning events, and establishing personalized outreach opportunities. Due to the diversity present in our neighborhood and schools, we acknowledge that we will need to offer a diverse array of service and connection opportunities. We want our local community to know that we are willing to enter into uncertainty as a church. While our church might vary from our neighborhood, we have much in common too. We want our neighborhood to personally experience the life-changing restoration and satisfaction that Jesus offers all through His gracious love.