

Too Many Churches?

by Dr. Ralph F. Wilson

"We don't need more churches in this town," grumbles a leader at Central Church. "There are too many churches already." Maybe.

When church planters surveyed Rocklin, California, a few years ago they found 11 churches for a population of 14,250, about 1 church per 1,300 residents. Not bad.

But when people say no more churches are needed, they are probably looking at the number of church buildings in town, not the number of people who don't attend church.

Let's count it up. And, hey, while we're at it let's be generous. Let's say each church building can hold 300 people. That means if every one of the 11 churches in town were filled each Sunday, only 23% of the present population could find a seat if they wanted to. But some churches have two services, you protest. Okay, then 46% of the residents could go to church.

But be realistic. Most of the churches struggle along with 75 people attending or less. Only the Catholic church and two others draw much more than that in Rocklin. So let's guess that these three churches draw 3000 per Sunday. We'll give the rest of the churches 100 each. Okay, count it up.

That's 3,800 total in church. The remainder are home, or out boating, or still asleep, or mowing the grass. The fact is 3 out of 4 residents of Rocklin are functionally unchurched. That's more than 10,000 people not in church.

Do the 10,000 need a new church? You bet. They need several. You see, new churches worth their salt aren't parasites on existing churches. They reach believers who dropped out of church years ago. They reach people who don't really know the Lord. They reach children who have never gone to Sunday school in their lives. They reach the lost.

So the next time someone says they don't need any more churches in their town, don't let them get away with counting buildings. Help them count people the way Jesus counts lost sheep. Prayerfully.